GOOD ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL WRITERS

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I am deeply grateful to Mr L. A. Noble who has given me the benefit of his wide literary experience and has made many valuable suggestions on non-medical points.

For certain points in Latin and Greek grammar I am indebted to Professor R. B. Onians, Professor of Latin, University of London, and to my cousin Mr J D P Bolton Fellow and Tutor Queen's College, Oxford.

The principal books I have consulted are

Modern English Usage by H. W. Fowler

Notes on the Composition of Scientific Papers, by T. Clifford Allbutt.

Usage and Abusage by Eric Partridge.

Good English and *Better English*, by G. H. Vallins.

Rhetoric and English Composition, by Herbert J. E. Grierson.

Mind the Stop, by G. V. Carey

Elementary Lessons in Logic by W. Stanley Jevons

Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press Oxford.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary third edition.

Greek Lexicon, by Liddell and Scott.

Latin-English Dictionary by Lewis and Short.

Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases

Various British and American Medical Dictionaries.

F. R.

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ARRANGEMENT

Except where stated otherwise, the passages indented are quotations from articles that have appeared in medical journals published in the United Kingdom in the last two or three years. Those incorporated in the text and enclosed in inverted commas are either common expressions or my own invention.

A completely satisfactory classification of faults has been difficult to achieve. It has not always been possible to decide whether a fault is one of logic or ambiguity of construction or grammar. Where a sentence contains more than one fault I have placed it in the category of the most flagrant of them, at the same time pointing out the other faults and giving cross-references to the pages on which they are more fully discussed. Within each category the examples are as far as possible arranged alphabetically.

"The writer" means the writer of the quotation and not myself.

I

Introduction

When I told a friend, who is himself well known for his interest in the improvement of scientific writing that I intended to write this book, he replied "That is a thing I wouldn t dare to do." That such an undertaking may be regarded as presumptuous I am fully aware nevertheless there were good reasons for my decision. Scrutiny of the medical journals revealed to me that, although the general standard attained was high, many contributors seemed to be either ignorant or careless of the rules of grammar and syntax. The same complaint was made by several correspondents, one of whom pointed out the need for a book corresponding to Fowler's *Modern English Usage*—that great classic which, besides being a mine of information, is a joy to read because of the author s pungent wit and endearing prejudices.

In contrast to the United States where several books on the subject have been published, this country has (so far as I am aware, and apart from the useful but very small booklets by Dr W R. Bett and by Sir Humphry Rolleston) produced only one—Sir Clifford Allbutt's *Notes on the Composition of Scientific Papers* This was first published in 1904 a second edition followed in 1905 and a third, delayed by the First World War in 1923. It has long been out of print. Though informative and attractive, like everything Allbutt wrote, it hardly meets modern requirements owing to changes in fashion and to the immense influx of new words that has since taken place.

It may be said that, whatever the subject, there is only one form of good English. The commonest mistakes in medical literature, such as false concords hanging participles and incorrect order of words, are found also in historical and literary works. On the other hand, medical literature differs from general literature in two important respects. First, in

common with other scientific literature, it deals with a mass of technical terms the correct use of which brings its own difficulties Secondly, the description of diseases and their treatment seems to encourage indulgence in certain professional mannerisms that are, to say the least, stereotyped and inelegant, e.g the use of indirect instead of direct speech and of the passive instead of the active voice.

At the outset it is pertinent to assess the standard of English attained by medical authors, to compare it with the standard attained by other authors and to ask whether it is deteriorating

THE STANDARD OF MEDICAL LITERATURE

Allbutt, from his great experience in reading theses wrote

> The matter of these theses is good, often excellent In composition some are fair and a few very good but the greater number are written badly and some very ill indeed. The prevailing defect of their composition is not mere inelegance it is such as to perplex, and even to travesty or to hide the author's meaning. Thus, for the judge who would be just, many of the theses are hard reading, and meritorious as in substance they may be are as they stand unfit for the printer

In fairness to the writers of these theses it should be pointed out that when Allbutt was Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge the University Ordinances required theses for the M.B as well as for the M D degree. Those for the M B degree were therefore mostly written by men only recently qualified by the Conjoint Board and in a language to which they had had but little time to become accustomed Moreover they were supposed to be written unaided Although, therefore, their perusal must have been painful to a person of Allbutt's scholarship and fastidiousness, his severe condemnation made insufficient allowance for inexperience.

The standard of medical writing may be judged at three levels scripts received by editors of journals and by readers of theses published articles and monographs and text-books Of the scripts only their recipients are in a position to judge Their standard, I am told, varies very greatly Some, though containing good enough matter are quite unacceptable without complete re writing others can be passed to the printer with no corrections other than those made to conform

to printers house-rules.* Most of them need correction, especially in punctuation, by editorial staffs. It should be pointed out, however that owing to lack of time and personnel these staffs are unable to do more than correct glaring errors of grammar construction and punctuation. Monographs and text-books naturally show medical literature at its best, for they are composed by experienced writers and have usually been scrutinized by the writers friends.

This book is concerned solely with published articles and is derived from scrutiny of the issues of several journals published in the United Kingdom in the last two or three years. The errors quoted are therefore mainly those that have escaped editorial vigilance. Their large number however must not be taken as a measure of the general journalistic standard they must be seen in perspective. A single number of the *British Medical Journal*, for instance, contains about 100,000 words, or about 5,000,000 in the course of a year Though minor lapses in construction and in the misuse of words (e.g case instead of *patient*) are common, major grammatical errors are remarkably few The opinion I have formed is that the standard, though naturally not uniformly reaching that of the best exponents of English, is one of which the profession has every reason to be proud, especially since the content is often highly technical and the meaning not easy to express. Without access to the original scripts it is impossible to determine in what proportion credit should be shared between editors and authors, but I suspect that it is the editors who are mainly responsible.

In any case criticism of medical editorship is far from my intention. My purpose is to act as midwife to those suffering the agonies of composition—agonies from which few are sufficiently gifted so as to be immune to point out the dangers that lie in their path and to help them to acquire a style that is pleasing and unambiguous.

To enter into more detail, I have formed the following impressions

1 The standard of an article may be safely judged from the opening paragraphs. If these are well written the whole article is well written except perhaps for a few minor lapses if they are badly written faults will be found throughout.

* For a definition of "house-rules," see p. [illegible]

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* For a definition of "house-rules," see p. 131.

2 Several errors, differing in kind, sometimes occur in the same sentence, indicating a lamentable ignorance of composition This has made their classification in this book difficult How I have overcome the problem I have described on p. ix

3 Bad English is by no means confined to young and inexperienced writers, many senior and prominent members of the profession are no less guilty

4. The worst written articles, many of them containing the most flagrant blunders, are (I deeply regret having to say it) those on medical education For some reason or other doctors flounder hopelessly out of their depth when expressing their views on this subject which concerns them so intimately

5 Medical literature consists of two components technical terms, which form, so to speak, the bricks, and plain English words which form the cement binding the bricks Technical terms bring their own difficulties because their construction and derivation are often faulty, but it is in the composition and adjustment of the cement of plain English that errors are most commonly found.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER FORMS OF LITERATURE

The man of science, a distinguished writer once wrote, appears to be the only man who has something to say and the only man who does not know how to say it." This sweeping statement seems to me unjust. If scientific writers are to be judged by their ability to convey to the lay mind the necessarily abstruse technicalities of their subjects, the interest they have succeeded in arousing proves that they are in general not wanting in literary skill. In *The Complete Plain Words* Sir Ernest Gowers has shown the faults in the composition of many ministerial directives Civil servants however are confronted with a somewhat different problem, their aim being so to frame their words that no loop-hole is left for administrative misinterpretation For instance, a slight error in wording may lead to claims for emoluments or pensions by thousands of people for whom they were not intended These special difficulties notwithstanding it is clear from the author's examples that civil servants are no less prone than are doctors to write faulty English.

Again, Mr G. H. Vallins, in *Good English* and in *Better English*, has culled from the literary weeklies errors that are equivalent to those found in medical journals and these articles, be it noted, are written mainly by people to whom writing is a vocation. It may therefore be justly concluded that doctors do not fall short of writers in other fields.

IS THE STANDARD OF MEDICAL LITERATURE DETERIORATING?

From time to time the complaint is made that the standard of medical writing is deteriorating. Sir Ernest Gowers * has expressed the opinion, based on what one would imagine to be a somewhat limited experience, that it is not as good as it was in the days of his father Sir William Gowers. The alleged deterioration is usually attributed to the decline in the study of Greek and Latin. But what is the evidence for such deterioration? Allbutt's book shows unmistakably that the errors made fifty years ago are the same as, and certainly no less flagrant than, those made today. Whether they were made less frequently could only be decided by thoroughly examining contemporary numbers of the journals. Circumstances, too, are entirely different. In the first place a far higher proportion of the profession than hitherto is engaged in writing. To unestablished consultants and specialists it is an essential step to promotion: their motto is "Publish or Perish." Many of them are the grandchildren of doctors who had few occasions to put pen to paper. Secondly, modern writers have to cope with a feature entirely unknown in Allbutt's day—the influx of an immense number of technical terms including not only those inherent to medicine but also those used in the sciences from which medicine derives much of its inspiration. Taking these facts into consideration, it would, I think, be difficult to make out that any literary deterioration has taken place.

A word now concerning my own attitude to this complex subject. Language is a living thing that is constantly adapting itself to the changing circumstances of society. To regard it as rigid and unalterable is sheer pedantry. Some expressions

* *The Practitioner*, Vol. 181, p. 328, 1958.

have been outmoded, some that were once irrationally taboo are now generally approved and some though approved by a majority are offensive to a minority One does not need to be a purist to be horrified on seeing in *The Times* an article headed *Gasification*. Somewhere between the extremes of pedantry on the one hand and Philistine laxity on the other each one of us must take his stand and in his choice he cannot fail to be influenced by prejudice. Though realizing the flexibility of the English language I incline, as I fully admit and as the following pages will show, to orthodoxy for I am convinced that only by such inclination can a good standard of English be maintained The corollary of this is that I do not expect my readers always to subscribe to my views

To illustrate the commoner faults I have given a large number of examples. I have done this deliberately Mere admonition, for instance, to use the active instead of the passive voice is useless. Only by giving many examples can the lessons be driven home. Even when they deal with the same fault they show slight shades of difference that deserve careful study

I am deeply grateful to the many who have unwittingly and unintentionally contributed to this book. Without them (as the saying goes) it could never have been written. My only regret is that they must remain anonymous Were I to divulge their names I should be left with scarcely a friend in the profession Let them console themselves with the reflection that their crimes have not been committed in vain, but will, I hope, serve as an awful warning to others To encourage those who find English composition difficult I have included some lapses on the part of the great masters.

Finally let me say that I quite expect readers to point the finger of scorn at me when they discover as they certainly will that I have myself committed many of the sins that I condemn

II

Advice to the Aspiring Writer

"Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" he asked.
"Begin at the beginning," the King said, gravely "and go on till you come to the end then stop."

Alice in Wonderland.

You have collected a number of observations hitherto unknown or imperfectly apprehended—observations concerning the incidence, signs, symptoms or treatment of some disease. From these you have drawn certain conclusions that either confirm or confound the views currently held. You may even have formed a new concept of the subject. You now wish, through the medium of the printed word, to communicate your observations and ideas to the minds of others. Your aim is to convince them of the reliability of your observations and the soundness of your argument. The key to this lies in one word—*clarity* Not for you any indulgence in orotund periods or flowery passages, but the plain, unvarnished truth and honest opinion.

To achieve clarity you must attend to four things you must be brief, you must choose the words that most accurately express your meaning you must observe the rules of grammar and you must arrange the words according to their relative importance. These I shall discuss fully in the chapters that follow Here I shall confine myself to some general remarks.

The first thing I want to impress upon you is that writing English is not easy Even to its best exponents it is a process that has many pitfalls. "English, says Mr Somerset Maugham (and he ought to know) "is a very difficult language and it is not without much study and much writing that the author can expect to gain even an adequate mastery of his instrument." I will add the opinion of another authority —A. C. Bradley "It is true" he says, "that our language is

a difficult instrument to use with full effect, on account of its richness in those seeming synonyms which ignorant or careless writers employ without discrimination, but in skilled hands it is capable of precision and energy which can be equalled in few languages either ancient or modern.

The task of the medical writer differs greatly from that of the professional author—the writer of novels, essays and *belles-lettres* To the professional author literary composition is everything To the medical writer it is a means to an end the description of his work is secondary to the performance of his work. This difference is illustrated by the tale told of Guy de Maupassant. When he apprenticed himself to Flaubert, a writer who took immense pains he was forbidden to publish anything for eight years The first result was the masterpiece *Boule de Suif* This period of training spent in the art of writing corresponds to the period spent by the doctor in the acquisition of professional skill

If then, writing is difficult for those whose vocation is writing it is all the more difficult for those to whom writing is subsidiary But the professional author has one advantage he can write all day The medical writer unless he is prepared to give up his week-ends and holidays to the task, is compelled to write after his day's work. One thing is certain—one cannot write well when one is tired.

To return to clarity Failure to make yourself clear may be due to three causes First, your familiarity with the subject may lead you to skip essential steps in your argument. What you have written may be clear to you and to those of your readers whose knowledge of the subject is as great as or greater than your own. But these are in a minority Having given much time and thought to the subject you should know more about it than most of your readers. They look to you for guidance and this you must give them.

Secondly the idea may be clear to you, but you cannot express it in words In this case you must juggle with different constructions until you arrive at the one that exactly fits your meaning Difficult though English is it has the great advantage that it provides several ways of saying the same thing

Thirdly—and this is far more serious—the meaning is not clear to yourself. In this case you must wrestle with yourself

to discover your meaning For if your thoughts are muddled your expression of them cannot fail to be muddled. It is unpardonable to say in answer to a request for an explanation, "Oh, but that's not what I meant."

You must have constantly in mind a mental picture of the persons whom you are trying to interest. You are not soliloquising, or writing to please yourself you are addressing those who have turned to you for information. They are a party to a contract you must therefore put yourself in their place. They may be paying you a fee for the privilege of reading your words, either in the form of a royalty if they have bought your book (or less fortunately for you, a subscription to the library from which they have borrowed it) or in the form of a subscription to the journal in which your words appear They are, directly or indirectly your customers and you must treat them fairly and courteously The least you can do therefore, is to make your meaning clear For if you are not clear you put them to the trouble of worrying out your meaning or trying to solve your ambiguities. This is what Quiller-Couch meant when he defined style as good manners in writing The class of reader for whom you are writing is of course for you to decide. If you are content with a small circle in your own specialty you may use esoteric terms understood only by them. But I think it is a mistake so to restrict yourself. You should try to interest the general reader and go to some pains to explain the terms you use.

It is a good plan to ask a friend to read what you have written. He will be able to look at the subject from a point of view different from yours, and, though not going into niceties of grammar and syntax, he will point out where you have failed to make your meaning clear But remember three things first, you are asking a great deal of your friend. Some people dislike reading long articles in typescript. Secondly select someone who, you are sure, will give you a candid opinion. There are plenty of people who, out of kindness of heart or because they are too lazy to read carefully make no criticisms, but tell you what a clever fellow you are. Thirdly do not be offended by the criticisms your friend makes. If it is admiration you want, why bother about the admiration of one person when you hope to get the admiration of a wide circle of

readers? True, he may wound your pride, but you will be foolish indeed if you let this affect your friendship You may not agree with him, but remember that he is doing his best to help you

If you want to learn to write well you must write, re write and re write again Although I am pen happy and have had more experience than many, I suffer just as much as others do from the agonies of composition It might be some comfort to you (and perhaps some profit) if I could insert here the various drafts of this chapter But this is impossible, owing partly to lack of space and partly because it would be beyond the ingenuity of the compositor Everyone has his own method but here is mine for what it is worth

First, having collected all my material and made a list of the separate headings I put down the facts or ideas in separate sentences and in roughly logical sequence I then connect the sentences, placing them in their correct logical sequence. From this second draft I delete all unnecessary words substitute better words change the order of words and attend to spelling and punctuation. This revision I repeat again and perhaps yet again, so that not until I have reached my fifth or sixth draft am I satisfied that I have expressed my meaning accurately I then put it aside for a day or two after which I come back to it again with a fresh mind and can look at it from a distance so to speak In the interval my subconscious mind has been at work. Like the solution of a cross-word puzzle ideas come to me when I am doing something else, or when I wake up in the night. Of course I read and re read what I have written not aloud but hearing the words in my head

When that master of English prose Sir Winston Churchill had finished writing *Marlborough* and had himself revised it two or three times he passed it on to his secretary the late Eddie Marsh for further revision Here is an extract from his instructions

The points I want you particularly to make are

1 Clumsy sentences where the meaning is obscure or the grammar questionable.

2 Repetition of words I have a good many favourites and they may crop up too often e.g vast, bleak, immense formidable etc

3. Repetitions of phrases, e.g where we talk of Marlborough as a great, wise, profound imperturbable statesman, etc., in several variants

4. Repetitions of arguments. My eye is blunted by much re-reading

5. Dull, boring stodgy passages. You might ask yourself the question Which ten thousand words would I cut? (We have plenty of words in hand.)

6. I hope you will be able to read this continuously and rapidly I want to get the reaction of your mind on the ensemble, and whether you miss anything or feel upset about anything in the general structure. My mature view of style is that it should follow the thought and also that I belong to the modern age and write with their knowledge and modes."

I call your special attention to the fifth of Sir Winston's admonitions. Don't be dull. Of all literary crimes dullness is the worst.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARTICLE

Medical articles are of two kinds, special and general. Special articles are those devoted to a single, circumscribed subject—an account of the incidence of a disease, the description of a disease hitherto unrecognized or of a new form of treatment. These form the great bulk of medical literature. Their structure is more or less stereotyped, affording little scope for individuality in expression. Beginning with an account of the existing state of knowledge, they describe in detail the method adopted, comparing the result with those previously obtained, and they end with a discussion and summary In general articles—those dealing with a wide survey of a subject or with philosophical, educational or administrative matters—there is more scope for the expression of individuality These are naturally written by the more senior members of the profession, for they are the result of long experience. But skill in their composition is acquired only by constant practice in the writing of articles on special subjects.

Although the form of the special article has become stereo-

typed, there are certain points that you would do well to bear in mind

The Opening

You must arouse the reader's interest *from the start*. Your opening sentence must strike hard with a brief statement of the subject and your reason for writing about it. Though references to previous work naturally come early, it is a mistake to begin with them Too often articles begin with this sort of thing Jones and Brown (1950) investigating the effects of this on that found so-and-so, Chatterjee and Langsprecher (1951) found so-and-so ' If, though you know what you want to write about, you are at a loss to know *how* to begin don't gnaw your pencil while trying out different openings, write the body of the article first. The beginning will then come to you later (This contradicts the advice given at the head of this chapter)

If the title with which you head your article is recondite, you must not neglect to define it in the first sentence. I have before me an article entitled Thesaurosis, a word to be found only in the larger American medical dictionaries Nowhere in the article does the word appear Another article is entitled 'Candidiasis ' This word is familiar to many but by no means to all readers, but one has to wade through more than half the article before one discovers its meaning

The Paragraph

The main divisions of your article may be separated by cross-headings but between these they should be divided into paragraphs Upon the correct use of paragraphs the attractiveness of presentation largely depends You should have regard both to the reader's eye and to logical content. If paragraphs are long they weary the eye If short and snappy, they suggest that your treatment of the subject is superficial or that you are defective in logical sequence—in short that you have a butterfly mind. They should occupy from about ten to twenty lines of print. A new paragraph denotes that you are moving to a different aspect of the subject. It should begin with a short introductory sentence, a kind of text to the sermon The rest of the paragraph is a development of this sentence and

must not contain anything irrelevant. The best models are to be found in Macaulay's *Essays*, though the paragraphs there are rather too long for modern taste.

The Summary

You should take care to write the summary succinctly but at the same time attractively. Many readers read the summary first and are attracted to or repelled from the main article by it.

Acknowledgments

You will of course acknowledge all the help you have received. Sometimes the list is so long—radiologists, pathologists, bacteriologists, sisters photographers secretaries, etc.—that there seems to have been little left for the author to do. I often wonder why a scientific worker should find it necessary to thank his senior for his "encouragement." The senior has probably suggested the investigation in the first place and has no doubt given his advice from time to time. For this he should of course be thanked. But the confession that the writer has needed encouragement in addition implies that he cannot stand on his own feet, that he cannot pursue his task assiduously without constant prodding.

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For references ("bibliography" is too grandiose a term) the Harvard system is now almost universally adopted. It is unnecessary to describe this system in great detail: models can be seen in any article. All you have to do is to copy them, noting carefully the arrangement of the words and figures and the kind of type used. At the end the list is arranged alphabetically. Names of journals are abbreviated according to international convention. If you cannot find the correct abbreviations write the names in full, leaving their abbreviation to the editor. But give the editor as little trouble as possible.

The older system is becoming obsolete but is still seen occasionally. The names of the authors quoted are followed by numbers printed in small type and listed at the end in the order of their appearance in the text. E.g. "Jones and Brown[1] found . . . Robinson[2] thought. . . ." Though less convenient than the Harvard system this system had the advantage that

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the writer could not include in the list publications to which he had not referred in the text. In the Harvard system, the list being arranged alphabetically, he can display his erudition by compiling an impressive list of publications (probably obtained from a librarian) to many of which he may have made no reference. This practice is to be condemned

III

Choice of Words

"Before you start, sir, perhaps you would ring Miss Wickham up. She instructed me to desire you to do so."
"You mean she asked you to ask me?"
"Precisely, sir."

P. G. Wodehouse, *Very good Jeeves*

GRANDILOQUENCE AND AFFECTATION

At weddings and similar functions all, or nearly all, the guests are arrayed in finery hired from a well-known establishment, though they try to appear as though it were their own. A few succeed in looking distinguished. These are they who look distinguished however they are dressed. The rest look self-conscious, or silly or both. They would look more natural and feel more comfortable in their own clothes. It is the same with writing. Apart from colloquialisms and technical terms, the fact that you are writing on a medical subject does not justify you in adorning that subject with words that you would not dream of using in ordinary speech. After you have written a sentence such as "Prior to the commencement of treatment," ask yourself, "Is this what I would say to a friend?" Would you, for instance, say "Prior to the commencement of my medical studies"? You certainly would not. You would say "Before I began my medical studies." Therefore, instead of "Prior to the commencement of treatment" write "Before treatment was begun." Here is an example from a medical journal

Rattlesnakes are the only important cause of envenomation.

You may remember the story of the old lady who, asked her opinion of a sermon, replied, "I didn't understand a word, but I do love to hear the blessed word Mesopotamia."

Some people tell you that, when there is a choice, the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic word is preferable to the Classical or Graeco-Roman word This rule is of very limited and frequently of doubtful application *Brief* for instance, is just as good as and in some contexts better than *short* *Insomnia* is more euphonious than *sleeplessness* Although our language is founded on Anglo-Saxon elements, it has been immeasurably enriched by invasion from Graeco-Roman sources These have given us innumerable words—*inflammation* for example, for which there is no Anglo-Saxon equivalent. Without them, indeed modern expression and especially scientific writing would be clumsy and laborious

Then again some people tell you always to prefer the shorter word A recent writer advises *say* instead of *affirm allege, assert, aver claim contend declare intimate, maintain* One must recognize, however that words such as these, though superficially synonymous convey different shades of meaning Some authorities indeed hold that true synonyms do not exist. Although shorter words are generally preferable, to confine oneself to them would be to impoverish one's vocabulary *Attempt* and *endeavour* are longer than *try* but in some contexts are preferable You should select the word that irrespective of its origin and length, best conveys your meaning that fits the context without offending as a key fits a lock without grating At the same time if two words one short, the other long are equally apt, choose the short one.

But you may ask if Shakespeare writes

The multitudinous seas incarnadine

when he means make the many seas red why shouldn't I use long words like that? The answer my dear boy (or girl) is twofold. In the first place, you have ample scope for indulgence in long words in the technical terms you have to use Secondly it is a matter of scale. You are concerned with the *reason* why some people excrete more potassium than they should or with subjects equally earthy—subjects that, however valuable they may be as contributions to national health are hardly comparable, as you must admit, to the descriptions of human feelings and emotions that are Shakespeare's concern

The words in the following list are not incorrect in their

proper place, though some of them show affectation The suggested alternatives are usually preferable.

Able

For "he is able to" write "he can."

Accommodation

Room.

Adequate

This word implies a required quantity with no superfluity or more simply enough but not too much. One may say "an adequate dose of morphia," but for an adequate supply of morphia" enough is more appropriate.

Administer

Appropriate when applied to justice, but too formal when applied to drugs. Write give.

Adumbrate

Outline sketch in outline.

Age-group, Age-bracket

In some contexts age-group is useful and, indeed, indispensable, especially when the ages in the groups are specified, but in many contexts *people* is better Younger people" is preferable to "younger age-groups." *Age-brackets* is a modern monstrosity

> The main interest is whether they apply to the total population of women in the age brackets 18–46 years.
> R of women aged 18–46. (Or better) to all women aged 18–46.

Ameliorate

> We have not yet encountered any evidence which would suggest that atherosclerosis is in any way ameliorated or even prevented by the use of hypotensive drugs.
> R *improved*. And for *encountered* R.: *found* (p. 19).

Approximately

This should be reserved for fine ranges of uncertainty especially those that are measured. For large and vague

ranges *about* is preferable "Approximately 26%" 'About three-quarters'

Armamentarium

> It is difficult to see how with our present therapeutic armamentarium

This monstrous, pompous bastard seems to mean *resources*, *gadgets*, or *box of tricks* If a military analogy is desired *weapons*, *armament*, or *armoury* are preferable.

Assume, Presume

These mean almost the same thing Note that *assume* (but not *presume*) is followed by *that* "I assume that he is correct.' 'I presume he is correct."

At the present time

A circumlocution for *now*, *nowadays*

Capable of

This implies capacity as in capable of accommodating" For mere ability use *can*. He can walk without crutches."

Categorize

A pretentious word for *classify*

Causation

Defined by the O E.D as the action of causing (like *pathogenesis* and *aetiology*) this word may be justified in that it leaves the way open for the possible existence of a complex process involving several causes acting separately or in conjunction but in many contexts it is no improvement on *cause* or *causes*

Causative factor

> Smoking has naturally received attention as a causative factor
> R as a contributory cause

Commence

Usual for church services meetings and sales. For all else write *begin*

Concerning

About or *on* are better in such expressions as "his views concerning diabetes."

Constitutes

An unnecessarily elaborate word for *is*, *forms*.

The effect of relaxin on the tissues thought to constitute the target organs for this substance.
R: thought to be

This is not just a matter of aesthetic importance but constitutes a very real danger to patients.
R of aesthetic importance; it is very dangerous. (Omit *patients*; it could not be dangerous to anyone else. Note also that *very real* is no more real than *real* p. 28).

The advent of chlorothiazide constituted an important advance in the management of hypertension.
R was.

Contraindicated

Although this word is in general use it is rarely preferable to the simpler expressions *not advisable should not be given*.

Dubiety

An affectation for *doubt*.

Elevation (of temperature or blood pressure)

Rise.

Encounter

Avoid this word. Use *meet come across find*.

Kernicterus was encountered in 14 patients.
R found (or better) Fourteen patients suffered from kernicterus. (See Voice, p. 97)

Vomiting was encountered more frequently
R Vomiting was commoner

Eventuate

The strict meaning is *come to pass*. The thing that eventuates is an outcome. An unnecessary word that should not be used for *happen*, *occur*

ranges *about* is preferable 'Approximately 26%," "About three-quarters'

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Medico

A term used almost exclusively by women students and by makers of cross-word puzzles. Quite harmless.

Practically

Strictly meaning the opposite of theoretically this word has come to be widely misused. When you have written "The swelling had practically disappeared" ask yourself what you meant. You meant *nearly* or *not quite*

Predecease

> Her husband predeceased her by two years.
> R: Her husband died two years earlier (or ago)

Preoperative(ly). Postoperative(ly)

These words are useful in their proper place as in "pre operative treatment," but for "the third postoperative day" it is better to write "On the third day after operation." The adverbs are clumsy and should be avoided.

> His condition is very much better than it was preoperatively
> R: than it was before operation.

Prior to

> Prior to the time of this presentation, and indeed for several years thereafter operations upon the gall-bladder were confined
> R Before, and indeed for several years after this presentation

Provided that

If is usually sufficient unless the proviso needs emphasis.

Quantify

Permissible only in a technical sense, as in building estimates. In the following it is horrible

> Now it is not always a question of quantifying the punishment to the crime.

Shades of W. S. Gilbert! "To let the punishment fit the crime."

Evidence (verb)

Be sparing of using as a verb a word that is more commonly used as a noun

> *Severe renal failure is evidenced clinically by the syndrome of uraemia.*
> R *is shown*

Evince

This is journalese for *show*

Exhibit (a drug)

An expression dating from 1601 Rather too formal and bedside mannerish for the present day *Give try* are preferable.

Extremities

For " coldness of the extremities why not write ' coldness of the hands and feet '? The word is sometimes wrongly applied to arms and legs which are not extremities but limbs

Facies

Unnecessary use of a Latin word

> Her facies was immobile and vacant.
> R *Her face.*

Fatal outcome

Very bad journalese for *death*

Identical

The same is usually preferable

Maintain

> They were unable to maintain their bronchi clear
> R They could not keep

Medicament

A pompous word for *drug*

> The following medicaments were presented daily
> R: The following drugs were given daily (Or since the drugs are going to be mentioned) The following were given daily

Undetectable

> In many it is undetectable either by doctor or patient.
> R: it cannot be detected by

Unavailable

> Comparable national figures are unavailable.
> R: are not available, cannot be obtained.

Mal-

> Nurses are mal-distributed.
> R: badly distributed.

ELEGANT VARIATION

Although writers should cultivate a wide vocabulary, they should avoid using different words for the same idea in the same sentence. Many of them think, quite erroneously, that the repetition of a word has a monotonous effect, and to circumvent it they indulge in what Fowler calls Elegant Variation. A typical example is when the third-rate journalist calls a church a sacred edifice.

> After eating cold foods hypoglycaemia develops sooner than after the ingestion of warm foods.

For *the ingestion of* read *eating* but, even so, *eating* is redundant.

> R: Hypoglycaemia develops sooner after cold than after warm foods.

> Torsion of the testis is followed by gangrene of the organ in 80% of cases.
> R: In 80 of patients (p. 30) torsion of the testis is followed by gangrene.

> A quiet, cooperative boy becoming an excitable, restless apprehensive individual.
> R: A quiet co-operative boy becoming excitable, restless and apprehensive

> The sex incidence is of no significance for only a few of the gentler sex sail in tankers.

The last is journalese at its worst. Observe, too, that the writer has not been able to avoid the repetition of the word *sex*.

> R: for only a few women sail in tankers.

> One patient died from progressive uraemia after two weeks; one succumbed after three months to a dissecting aneurysm and cardiac infection.

Recommence

If commence is bad, recommence must be worse.

> Treatment was recommenced on the third day
> R renewed or restarted

Render

A word of many meanings, including giving thanks, paying tribute and covering stonework with plaster Inappropriate in the following

> A most unusual feature rendering early diagnosis impossible.
> R making

Require

Don t forget the shorter words *need want*.

Responsible (Is responsible for)

This means *is accountable for* Not to be used when *causes* will do.

Sufficiently frequently

Avoid the apposition of adverbs ending in *ly* Often enough

Terminate

Why not use the little word *end*?

Unable to

Cannot.

Variety of

Use the adjective *various*

INELEGANT NEGATIVES

The negatives of most positive adjectives can be formed by the prefixes *in*, *un*, *non*, and *mal* but in some words the result is inelegant. In these it is better to use a separate word *not* or the equivalent.

Non-significant

Not significant

Medical writers are just as much to blame. There are plenty of synonyms. For *considerable—big, large great substantial ample voluminous, capacious* For *considerably—far much substantially*

In the following *considerable* occurs twice in a paragraph of three sentences. (I have omitted the intervening sentence)

> The normal thyroid gland varies considerably in different parts of the world. Accurate prediction in life of the mass of the thyroid is difficult, and a considerable error may be found.
> R varies greatly in difficult, and a substantial

In the following *considerable* occurs twice in the same sentence

> When precipitation of cardiac failure has been rapid, oedema is frequently minimal despite considerable elevation of the jugular venous pressure and considerable liver enlargement.

This sentence is further marred by indirect expression and by the emphasis on nouns instead of on verbs (p 96)

> R When cardiac failure has been precipitated rapidly oedema is frequently very slight although the jugular venous pressure is much raised and the liver greatly enlarged.

Fowler allows the use of *considerable* in the sense of *a good deal of* in immaterial, but not in material, things. In my opinion, however vagueness is deplorable in all things. The writer should ask himself 1 what he means by it 2 whether it is necessary 3 whether he cannot think of a more explicit word.

> The proposals of this carefully compiled report are considerably different from the ill-defined concept of "comprehensive chest service" that we previously criticized.
> R quite different, or differ in many ways.

> It is essential that these patients be seen by the doctor at intervals of not less than a fortnight and considerably more often in the early stages.
> R much more often

> There is still a considerable mortality from kwashiorkor During the past three years 97 (45%) of 215 cases admitted to this hospital died.

The mortality being expressed in figures, why introduce the vague word *considerable*?

> R The mortality from kwashiorkor is heavy; during the past three years

R after two weeks one died after three months from a dissecting

or

after two weeks one after three months from

Elegant variation may fog the meaning

> In a further 3 cases reviewed the association between acropachy and exophthalmic ophthalmoplegia is not proved, because insufficient data about the time of onset of digital clubbing and of the presence of malignant (as opposed to benign) exophthalmos is recorded.

Acropachy and *digital clubbing* are synonymous The inclusion of both terms makes the reader wonder whether there is a subtle difference between them of which he is unaware (*Data* is plural Therefore, for *is recorded* read *are recorded*)

For a better construction

> R association between digital clubbing and exophthalmic ophthalmoplegia is not proved, because data about are insufficient.

THE EXPRESSION OF SIZE AND QUANTITY

In the expression of size and quantity a measurement of comparison should be given whenever possible and the object used for comparison should be of unvariable size and familiar to readers Everyone knows the size of a tangerine orange, but few know the size of a millet seed (a word found in the older anatomy books) There are, of course, conditions such as oedema of the thigh in which both measurement and comparison are difficult or impossible Thus the writer cannot help but he should at least try to give some indication and not limit his vocabulary to a few stereotyped words

Considerable (considerably)

Of all meaningless words this is the commonest It is the willing but anaemic maid-of all work of English writers Here it is in *The Times*

> The Labour Party have, more especially in a report written by Mr Douglas Jay gone into considerably more detail, though this may be no more than the usual privilege of the Party in opposition. The Conservatives intend to make considerable grants towards the capital cost of new factories

A decreased amount of.	Less.
A smaller number of.	Fewer
Increased in length.	Lengthened
Increased in width.	Widened.
Decreased in length.	Shortened.
Decreased in width.	Narrowed.
Adjacent to.	Near to Next to.

ADJECTIVES OF QUALITY

Adjectives of quality should be few and precise.

> The largest single presently preventable source of heat loss is

It is difficult to translate this into English because *presently* is obscure. Is this word meant in the Shakespearean sense, and is *single* necessary? I suggest

> The largest preventable source of foetal loss is

> In the investigation of apparently cardiological causes of loss of consciousness
>
> R. In the investigation of loss of consciousness apparently due to the heart

> Severe primary water-deficiency heat exhaustion

Here a noun, *water-deficiency* masquerades as an adjective, and it is not clear to the uninitiated whether *severe* and *primary* refer to *water-deficiency* or to *exhaustion*.

Presumably the meaning is

> Severe primary water-deficiency due to heat exhaustion

SUPERLATIVES

Be sparing in your use of superlatives. When used literally they defeat their object by obvious overstatement. An attribute is not always strengthened by *very*. *Very pale* does not sufficiently signify a degree of paleness greater than *pale*. If an attribute is of exceptional degree a strong word such as *extremely* should be used. Note that there are some adjectives that are complete in themselves and can be neither

Marked

This word may mean *large, moderate, obvious, noticeable*, or *unmistakable*

A marked swelling

Who marked it, and how was it marked? Like a hot cross bun?

Marked bilateral exophthalmos was present.

In the following the writer accuses the patient of having used the word

She noticed marked tinnitus and some deafness in the right ear

The patient certainly did not say I noticed marked tinnitus

Sizeable

Sizeable intercoronary arterial anastomoses were observed.
R Fairly large.

More or less

The patient develops a chronic state of more or less intoxication.

There is no such state as more or less intoxication

R a chronic state of intoxication of varying degree.

Majority

To write *majority* instead of *most* is one of the commonest faults Here is one example out of thousands

The majority of cases presented with a normocytic orthochromic blood-picture.
R Most of our patients (p. 30)

For *great majority vast majority* write *nearly all*

Minimal

Physical signs are usually minimal.
R very slight.

Further Expressions of Quantity and Size

An excessive amount of.	Too much.
An increased amount of	More.
A great deal of.	Much
A large number of.	Many

CHANGING THE PARTS OF SPEECH

Do not transfer a word from its own part of speech to another except in recognized idioms, such as "capitation fee."

Examples

ADJECTIVE TO NOUN

There are two independent variables that determine survival chances.

R. the chances of survival.

NOUN TO ADJECTIVE

He was admitted as an emergency case.

R. as an emergency

A chronic patient may prove to be showing such behavioural changes.

R changes in behaviour

VERB TO ADJECTIVE

He fails to perceive that this worry is causative of the child's condition.

R this worry causes the

modified nor intensified Among these are *unique*, *real*, *bed ridden*, *superb*, *outstanding*

> The use of extracorporeal circulations for open cardiac surgery has presented many new and unique problems.

The many cannot be unique.

> The dangers attendant upon this treatment are very real.

A thing cannot be more real than real

> The most outstanding feature of the abdominal pain is its constancy

Since the total number of features must be small there can hardly be more than one of them that stands out.

Similarly

> The advance in anaesthetics in the past twenty-five years has been as outstanding as any other advance in medicine over the same period.
>
> R In the past twenty five years anaesthetics have advanced as rapidly as other branches of medicine.

One is reminded of Ouida s famous remark All rowed fast, but none so fast as stroke And in *The Gondoliers* W S Gilbert wrote When every one is somebody then no one s anybody

You must always write objectively keeping your own feel ings to yourself Words signifying subjective impressions such as *horribly terribly startlingly shockingly immensely* detract from the value of your observation by giving the impression of over emotionalism. I have often read Teeth appalling Whom do they appal? The longer we live and the wider our experi ence, the less easily are we appalled until we may reach the stage when our sensitiveness is completely blunted

> The blood-pressure fluctuated tremendously during the next eleven days, rising to peaks of 250/150 and at other times falling to 190/85

Since the fluctuation being expressed in figures is sufficiently striking, comment is superfluous

> R During days the blood-pressure fluctuated between 250/150 and 130/85.

Five cases of myxoedema in people over the age of 60 are described.

R: Five patients over the age of 60 suffering from myxoedema are described.

In the case of the majority of our patients

R. In most of our patients

The case of a patient with X disease is described.

R: We describe a patient with X disease.

Cases with suspected neoplasms were referred to thoracic surgeons direct, but in a number of cases patients were first seen by chest physicians. A few patients

R Patients with suspected neoplasms were referred to thoracic surgeons direct, but many were first seen

Only two cases of severe haemorrhage have occurred in this series of patients receiving nicoumaline.

R In this series of patients receiving nicoumaline only two had severe

As in the case of many other chronic disorders, patients vary

R As in many other chronic disorders

In the case of children, however the position is quite different.

R In children, however

In three cases in this series the patient rejected such advice.

R Three of these patients rejected this advice.

2. Do not use *case* in a sentence containing *case* used in a different sense

These cases present great difficulty in any case.

R These patients

3. Do not use *case* where it suggests a different meaning, even though there may be no ambiguity

In the case of three of the compounds estimated

? the container of the compounds.

R In three of

4. Do not use *case* unnecessarily

In the severe case of status epilepticus a state of respiratory insufficiency exists which must be relieved.

R In severe status epilepticus respiratory insufficiency exists and must be relieved.

Affect, Effect (verbs)

To affect means *to influence* *to exert an effect on* "The drug affects the hearing" *To effect* means *to bring about.* "It effected an improvement."

IV

Incorrect Words

I only took the regular course ... the different branches of Arithmetic—Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.
Alice in Wonderland.

From the venial offence of using ill-chosen words we pass to the mortal offence of using words in the wrong sense. In the forefront, as befits its heinousness, I put

THE BAD CASE

Now that the poor are called underprivileged, asylums called mental hospitals, and hardened sinners called recidivists, we may at any moment receive a pronouncement from on high banning the use of *case* and ordering the use of *patient*. Apart from the difference in meaning, *patient* certainly sounds more human and gives a more pleasing effect. This is not to say that *case* should never be used: it has its place, especially in lists and tables. Although *a case of* runs more easily than *a patient with* or *a patient suffering from*, the writer should learn when to use the one and when to use the other. *The New Sydenham Society's Lexicon* 1732 defines *case* as 'a record of the progress of disease in an individual'. It is the condition or instance of diseases in patients as distinguished from the patients themselves. It follows that a case cannot survive, die, or be discharged from hospital, although the word is often used in these contexts.

Our ten cases who were admitted ...

The following examples show the different forms the error may take and the ways to avoid them.

1. Do not combine *case* with *patient* or other words having the meaning of the latter.

merely because what is around us is not over us. *Under the circumstances* is an idiom recognized since 1665. According to the O.E.D. it is to be used when one's action is affected by circumstances and *in the circumstances* when mere situation is to be expressed. Ignoring this subtle distinction, both expressions are correct. I prefer *in the circumstances*.

Claim

To claim has only one meaning—to demand the recognition of something as one's own. "He claims to be the first to have described the syndrome." The word has come to be wrongly used for *assert, maintain, contend, represent*, as in "He claims that his method is more reliable."

Comparative, comparatively

See *relative, relatively* below.

Comprise

This means to be composed of and is generally used when there are more than two components. The whole comprises the parts; the parts do not comprise the whole.

The following is correct:

> The second group comprised those in which the membranes burst spontaneously.

The following are incorrect:

> Abdominal pain, an altered bowel habit and weight loss comprise the triad of symptoms.
> R. form the triad.

> Since n. demonstrated that bone material is rich in nitrate, which comprises about [illegible] of normal bone
> R. forms.

The Times is not blameless:

> The display of solidarity in support of the party's principles made on Tuesday by the trade union group, which comprises two-fifths of the parliamentary party

Comprise is an all-embracing word, so that, if used, all the components must be mentioned. If any of them are omitted, write *include*.

Ambiguity

This should be applied only to statements not to actions Here is a malapropism.

> *The treatments necessitated irradiation of large areas, and in order to do this with the least ambiguity a single field to cover the whole area is normally preferred.*
>
> R In order to irradiate the necessarily large areas with the greatest possible uniformity a single large field was normally (? usually) preferred.

Anticipate

To anticipate means to forestall or to do something before the due time. The modern extension to *expect* or *await*, though becoming increasingly frequent, should be resisted Gowers lays down the useful rule that it may be used before a substantive object, but never before an infinitive or a clause beginning with *that*.

INCORRECT USE

> It was anticipated that the treatment of such large volumes of tissue must inevitably result in considerable disturbance. Therefore it was decided
>
> R Because the treatment of such large volumes of tissue must inevitably cause much disturbance it was decided
>
> Invitations were issued to six contractors who submitted quotations which were lower than had been anticipated. It was anticipated by the contractor that the building will be completed in sixteen months.
>
> R lower than had been expected. The contractor expects that

But *feared* in the first sentence and *hoped* in the second would have made the passage more lively

CORRECT USE

> On the second post-operative day he anticipated by some hours a blanket bath by getting into the ordinary bath unaided.

A better construction however, would have been

> On the second day after operation he got into the ordinary bath unaided some hours before his blanket bath was due. (See *postoperative* p 21)

Circumstances

In the circumstances or *under the circumstances?*

Fowler calls it puerile to object to *under the circumstances*

delusion is an erroneous belief due to mental derangement and illusion is an impression, such as the apparent bending of a stick in water accepted by the senses but not necessarily by the mind. In short, a delusion is a mental deception and an illusion a sensory deception.

Depend

It is a common mistake to omit *on* between *depend* and a clause, as in "It depends whether the temperature has subsided."

Dependant, Dependent, Dependence

Dependant is a noun meaning "a person who depends on another for support, position, etc." (O.E.D.) *Dependent*, an adjective, means hanging down and "having its existence conditioned by that of something else" (O.E.D.) *Dependence* is the state of being dependant.

Differentiate, Distinguish

Although these words are synonymous, it is advisable in medical writing to restrict *differentiate* to a biological process whereby one kind of tissue changes into, or becomes different from, another and always to use *distinguish* for a mental process whereby a thing can be seen to differ from another thing. In the following *distinction* would have been more appropriate

> A differentiation must be made between osteomalacia and osteoporosis.

> The usual method of assessing clearing, which compares the optical densities of lipaemic plasmas before and after intravenous heparin, does not allow the differentiation to be made.

Enjoy

A word that can be used as the equivalent of *experience* only when the circumstances of its use are apt and happy. We cannot say that a person "enjoys bad health" unless we mean (what is true of many people) that he takes pleasure in being ill, i.e. that he is a hypochondriac.

> The collection of a series of lectures within the static covers of a book requires stronger and more ruthless pruning than this book has enjoyed.

Confidence

Unquestioning faith To be in one's confidence means that the person confided in can be trusted with the other's secrets.

> The patient who seems apprehensive before, during or after diagnosis or therapy (whether or not he is in the confidence of his doctor but most often when he is not) is for all practical purposes under the influence of fear

This says that the doctor confides in his patient, when the opposite is obviously meant.

> R he has confidence in his doctor

Conventional

Almost synonymous with *orthodox*, this means recognizing generally accepted standards or rules

Consider

This means *give thought to meditate upon ponder*, without necessarily coming to a decision or it implies that time and attention have been given to a subject before a pronouncement is made It should not be used for *discuss* as in He considered several possibilities or for *believe think*

> M. devoted a paper to this subject, in which he considered that these joints
> R In a paper on this subject M. expressed his belief that
> (See The subordinate clause, p 98)

Deliberately

This means *intentionally* or *after much thought* It does not mean *unhesitatingly* as in the following

> This is the underlying question which needs to be deliberately faced.
> R squarely

Delineate

This refers only to drawing or sketching

> The fields of irradiation were shaped so as to delineate the boundaries of the lungs.
> R so as not to overstep

Delusion, Illusion

The O E.D and Fowler make no clear distinction between these words For medical purposes the broad difference is that

delusion is an erroneous belief due to mental derangement and illusion is an impression, such as the apparent bending of a stick in water accepted by the senses but not necessarily by the mind. In short, a delusion is a mental deception and an illusion a sensory deception.

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Although these words are synonymous, it is advisable in medical writing to restrict *differentiate* to a biological process whereby one kind of tissue changes into, or becomes different from, another and always to use *distinguish* for a mental process whereby a thing can be seen to differ from another thing. In the following *distinction* would have been more appropriate

> A differentiation must be made between osteomalacia and osteoporosis.

> The usual method of assessing clearing, which compares the critical dilution of lipaemic plasma before and after intravenous heparin, does not allow the differentiation to be made.

Enjoy

A word that can be used as the equivalent of *experience* only when the circumstances of its use are apt and happy. We cannot say that a person "enjoys bad health" unless we mean (what is true of many people) that he takes pleasure in being ill, i.e. that he is a hypochondriac.

> The reflection of a series of lectures within the static covers of a book requires stronger and more ruthless pruning than this book has enjoyed.

Confidence

Unquestioning faith To be in one's confidence means that the person confided in can be trusted with the other's secrets.

> The patient who seems apprehensive before, during or after diagnosis or therapy (whether or not he is in the confidence of his doctor but most often when he is not) is for all practical purposes under the influence of fear

This says that the doctor confides in his patient, when the opposite is obviously meant

> R he has confidence in his doctor

Conventional

Almost synonymous with *orthodox*, this means recognizing generally accepted standards or rules

Consider

This means *give thought to meditate upon ponder*, without necessarily coming to a decision or it implies that time and attention have been given to a subject before a pronouncement is made It should not be used for *discuss* as in He considered several possibilities or for *believe think*

> M. devoted a paper to this subject, in which he considered that these joints
> R In a paper on this subject M. expressed his belief that
> (See The subordinate clause, p. 98)

Deliberately

This means *intentionally* or *after much thought* It does not mean *unhesitatingly* as in the following

> This is the underlying question which needs to be deliberately faced.
> R squarely

Delineate

This refers only to drawing or sketching

> The fields of irradiation were shaped so as to delineate the boundaries of the lungs.
> R so as not to overstep

Delusion, Illusion

The O E.D and Fowler make no clear distinction between these words For medical purposes the broad difference is that

Individual (adjective)

The correct use is to describe an attribute peculiar to a person in contrast to that of a class or team. "The best individual performance" The word must not be used for *own*, *separate* etc.

> The nurse then washes her hands and dries both her hands on her individual sterile towels.
> R: and dries them on her own sterile towels.

(She would hardly have dried only one of her hands.)

> Individual lesions are almost always radio-sensitive.

Presumably the writer means *single* or *isolated*.

> In considering whether operation should be undertaken in any individual patient with myasthenia gravis
> R in a patient with (*Individual* is redundant)
>
> Of the individual patients, all showed a significant fall in their standing systolic blood-pressures.
> R All the patients showed

Initiate

People are initiated into mysteries and ritual. The word should not be used for *begin*.

> It would thus seem reasonable to initiate a six months course in

Institute

Another word wrongly used for *begin*. It means to start something of importance with the hope of establishing it. "And did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory" (*Book of Common Prayer*)

> Treatment with thiamine was instituted.
> R: begun. Or better A course of thiamine was begun.

Involve

Originally meaning *wrap up*, *involve* has now become a vague general utility word normally used in the passive voice to give information about some recent event. "Three vehicles were involved in the accident." "The strike involved a thousand workpeople." Its meanings and uses are innumerable and are being added to every day. Allbutt, from his experience in reading theses found it used in the sense of *attack*, *invade*, *injure*, *affect*, *pervert*, *encroach upon*, *influence*, *enclose*, *implicate*, *permeate*

There is no accounting for tastes, but *ruthless pruning* is hardly a thing to enjoy

R The collection of a book should have been ruthlessly pruned. (Why *more ruthless*? Had it been pruned at all?)

Enquiry, Inquiry

An *enquiry* is a quest for a simple fact such as the time of a train An *inquiry* is an investigation.

Ensure, Insure, Assure

Ensure means to make certain *Insure* is confined to life insurance and similar contracts. *Assure* means giving one's word, but many companies call themselves assurance companies

Equilibration

Since in health there is complete equilibration between carbon dioxide in alveolar air and in pulmonary capillary blood

Equilibration is wrong because it means the act of producing or maintaining equilibrium, i.e by an external agency

R in complete equilibrium

Extraneous, Extrinsic

Extraneous means brought in from outside as in extraneous aid

Extrinsic is the opposite of *intrinsic* and means adventitious or not essential.

Following

A word that unless very carefully used may lead to ambiguity or even absurdity (as in the example below) because of its meaning of *in pursuit* It is far safer and better in every way to use the preposition *after*

The patient collapsed following a large haemorrhage.

He was not pursuing it.

R after But it is permissible to use the verb " The patient's collapse followed "

Fortuitously

This does not mean *fortunately* it means *by accident*

Meretricious

Originally from L. *meretricius* *pertaining to a harlot* it now means *worthless or showily attractive* It does not mean *plausible*

Meticulous

Derived from L. *metus* fear the strict meaning is carefulness carried to excess owing to timidity or to an obsession such as is exhibited by people with a mania for cleanliness. It is not synonymous with *scrupulous* or *punctilious* which indicate commendable actions. It is incorrect to say "the directions should be meticulously followed," but correct to say owing to his meticulous suturing the operation lasted far too long" Such, at any rate, is the purist's view (Fowler devotes three columns to fulminating support of it.) But since the word is now commonly used in a commendatory sense the purist should give way This is a case in which extension of the original meaning is sanctioned by good usage.

Objective

A vogue word (p. 146) for *object*, *purpose* aim, *goal*

The subjects understood the objective of the trial.

The word is now in the process of being supplanted by *target* (p. 147)

Oblivious

This does not mean *ignorant*, *unaware* or *unconscious* it means *no longer aware* or *unmindful of what was previously known*. It is wrongly used, e.g in "he was oblivious of his surroundings."

Partially

This word implies a bias and should not be used for *partly* as in "partially paralysed," but the adjective, *partial* can be used for incomplete.

Prescribing

To *prescribe* in the medical sense, is to order or recommend a course of treatment. It is a personal act and cannot be used to describe the action of inanimate objects.

pervade, *penetrate* *dislocate* and *contaminate* To this list may be added is, concern, cause I select the following out of a great many examples

> We are at an awkward intermediate stage halfway towards understanding of the factors involved.
> R towards understanding the factors concerned.
>
> The dislodged liver tissue was found to be involved in a miliary granulomatous infiltration compatible with miliary tuberculosis.
> R riddled with
>
> some of these falling into definite symptoms according to the organs mainly or primarily involved.
> R affected.
>
> A major pathway in the biosynthesis of hydrocortisone involves the formation of 11-deoxyhydrocortisone.
> R is.

Listed

Appropriate in a tradesman s catalogue, but not in the following

> The patient listed here was an Indian.
> R mentioned, described or included.

Literally

The use of *literally* when the opposite is meant is one of our great literary jokes e.g He literally exploded " It is used as a sort of modification of a statement to save it from being too sweeping or too sensational Curiously enough it is not meant to be taken literally The house was literally burned to the ground does not mean that not a stone was left standing but that the building was gutted or made uninhabitable.

> *The tables had been literally swept of all vestige of food*
>
> The half hand is then introduced into the vagina, which is literally filled with obstetric cream.

Does the writer mean *completely* filled or *into the vagina where there were large quantities of obstetric cream?* (What is a half hand?)

Materialize

This means to invest with material attributes and to assume a bodily form (O E.D) Not to be used for arrive occur or happen as, e.g in ' The expected fall of temperature did not materialize.

they are afraid of committing themselves to too dogmatic a statement. These words moreover should not be used for *rejective respectively*

> A relatively high proportion of patients who failed to respond to iron therapy was found to have a megaloblastic anaemia.

Relatively to whom? Perhaps the writer meant *fairly* or *more than could be expected.*

> Minor degenerative changes are a relatively familiar feature of hypophysial adenomata.

Relatively to what?

Relative and *relatively* are sometimes used tautologically (p. 50)

> The different components may vary in their relative susceptibility to iron.

Relatively is implied in *vary*: no other susceptibility arises.

> It appears that it is much more frequent in the Indians than among the Bantu population, in whom it is relatively rare.

Relativity has been established in *much more frequent.* The correct word is *comparatively* (Note the faulty change from *in* to *among* and the use of indirect expression, p. 95.)

> R. It is apparently much more frequent in the Indian than in the Bantu population; in the latter it is comparatively rare.

> It is unfortunate that the end-result is not known in a relatively large number of cases (27–45%).

The percentage being stated, *relatively* has no meaning

> R. In 27–42% the end-result is unfortunately not known.

Comparative comparatively are similarly misused.

Respective, Respectively

Gowers says that these are used unnecessarily or wrongly in legal and official writing more often than any words in the language. I do not think this is true of medical writing but I agree with him that they are "used wrongly or unnecessarily more often than they are used rightly" Fowler is particularly scornful. Apart, he says, from their correct use they are used to give information that may be needed by fools, they may repeat what is said elsewhere they may say nothing intelligible, they may be used for some other word, or they may give a wrong meaning.

The correct meaning is *in the order named*, e.g. "rubro-

All the diets advised are alike in prescribing a low intake of calories and carbohydrates.

A diet cannot *prescribe*, it provides

Proportion

This word demands the statement of a total, a lump sum or other figure to which the proportion relates Without this it is meaningless, it cannot be left without assistance to work out its own salvation.

In a proportion of children
R In some children

In the following *number* would have been better but the whole construction is faulty

The proportion of all anaemic women who had an inadequate overall diet during pregnancy *was substantially higher* than in normal controls.

R In the anaemic women the number who had an inadequate diet during pregnancy was substantially higher than in normal controls. (*All* is redundant because *proportion* must take all the women into account. *Overall* is redundant.)

Protagonist

This is not the opposite of *antagonist* The first two syllables are derived from the Greek *proto* first, and not from *pro* The word originally meant the actor who played the principal part in Greek drama. It should therefore not be used for *advocate* or *supporter* but should be confined to the pioneer or principal person concerned. Lister was the protagonist of antiseptic surgery those who accepted it were supporters

Incorrect use is shown in

It is astonishing to notice that according to some protagonists ethical rules should be relaxed in this age of broadcasting and television.

R Some, it is astonishing to notice take the view that

Relative, Relatively

Like *proportion* above these words must have somebody or something to which they can be related Without these they are meaningless If one says In a relatively short time one must be prepared to answer the question relatively to what?" Writers are apt to throw these words in casually or carelessly without providing any standard presumably because

Reversal

This is now being used wrongly in the sense of *cure, improvement*

Sometimes this is an irreversible state
R. Permanent.

The following are obscure. I give the presumed meaning

The syndrome is reversible.
R: Can disappear or be abolished.

The complication was reversed by
R. Improved or made to disappear

I reported a case of reversal of suxamethonium paralysis with neostigmine.
R. Abolition.

Series

This is not synonymous with *group* or *collection*. The members of a series (it is a singular noun) must have some feature that is common to them all. They should follow each other at intervals of time that are fairly regular and not too widely separated. A person may write a series of articles or a serial story but the following is incorrect

A valuable series of bladder cases has been collected.
R. A valuable collection has been made.

Status

This means position in society or a profession. It must not be used for *state* or *condition* as in the following

If we simply compare the status of the hip opposite an arthrodesis

The nutritional status of man depends on an adequate intake of food followed by its efficient digestion and absorption from the intestine.

Variation

Variation does not mean *difference*; it means *change* or *departure from the normal*

There was, however, a remarkable sex variation. In both groups the incidence of pain and stiffness in females was almost exactly double that in males.

R. There was, however, a remarkable sexual difference. In both groups pain and stiffness were almost exactly twice as frequent in females as in males.

leuco- and cyano- mean red, white and blue respectively" It would be wrong to say 'rubro-, leuco-, and cyano- mean colours respectively

The following shows correct use

> Papain and bromelain are proteolytic substances extracted from papaya fruit and the pineapple plant respectively

Respectively can sometimes be used without naming the antecedents, i e the words to which they refer Gibbon is much addicted to this construction

> Confined to their respective temples and cities, they [the ministers of *Polytheism*] *remained without any connection of* discipline or government.

A better word is *several* that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities" (*Book of Common Prayer*) Messrs Tupman Winkle and Snodgrass repaired to their several *homes* (*Dickens*)

> The patients for caesarean section were given 2½ units one hour preoperatively The infants were born 79, 105 and 82 minutes later respectively

Even here the *meaning is* clear without *respectively* In the following the word is redundant

> There are several admirable chapters in which the respective authors, having discussed

> *Humanity should be satisfied, by all means, by giving* a note from the respective employer of father or mother stating that their children are ill and require the attention of a parent.

> *Owing to the vagaries of Earth and Moon in their respective* orbits

Whatever the American and Russian space rockets may do Earth and Moon can be trusted to stay in their orbits. The translators of the *New Testament* put it better

> *There is one glory of the sun*, and *another glory* of the moon, and another glory of the stars for one star differeth from another in glory

Restriction

This implies a personal act

> In the past the disease has been restricted to that part of Asia east and south-east of India.

If this means that it was brought about by human agency *restricted* is correct but if it means that it was due to natural causes *confined* should have been used

V

Verbosity

> We next went to the School of Language where three Professors sate in consultation upon improving that of their own country. The first Project was to shorten Discourse by cutting Polysyllables into one, and leaving out Verbs and Participles, because in reality all things imaginable are but Nouns. The other was a Scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever; and this was urged as a great advantage in point of Health as well as brevity. For it is plain, that every word we speak is in some degree a diminution of our Lungs by Corrosion, and consequently contributes to the shortening of our lives.
>
> *Gulliver's Voyage to Laputa.*

I began my career in the Cambridge Physiological Laboratory under Professor J N Langley who was editor and proprietor of *The Journal of Physiology* When I sent him my first papers I received a sharp rebuff He returned them with his blue pencil through about half my words. (In this experience I was by no means alone.) I protested, "Must you really cut out all these words, sir?" He answered, "Read it again and tell me if I have cut out a single word that matters." I had to admit that he had not done so. For this lesson I have always been grateful

When you have written an article read it carefully and subject it to ruthless slaughter even though the words, when you wrote them, seemed the darling children of your brain. At the same time you should be careful not to omit anything essential to the argument. If you want a model, study Mr Micawber's corrections of his own loquacity

> Thank you, she is tolerably convalescent. The twins no longer derive their sustenance from Nature's founts—in short they are weaned.

> I am at present, my dear Copperfield, engaged in the sale of corn upon commission. It is not an avocation of a remunerative description—in other words, it does not pay

Visualize

The only meaning of this word is *to form a mental image of* It does not mean *to make visible* as in 'The appendix could not be visualized radiologically' R ' could not be seen radiologically'

> Our use of relaxing agents now makes visualization of the larynx relatively easy
>
> R now makes the larynx easily visible. (Omit *relatively* p. 40)

I end this chapter with an unusually gross abuse of a word.

> Ripe cervix is a horticultural term used in an almost riparian setting which denotes a soft cervix which is taken up and admits one or two fingers.

Riparian has only one meaning—pertaining to a river bank. So far as I know the only person whose birth was associated with a river bank was Moses and he was put among the bulrushes after his birth

between these terms is by no means clear-cut. Between pleonasm and circumlocution there is a difference in scale. The former is applied to redundant words in a sentence, the latter to general redundant expression. Tautology is perhaps in a class apart in that it means repetition of the same idea in different words. In the following examples I have adopted this classification, but in studying them the reader should bear in mind the vagueness of the distinction.

PLEONASM

Surgeons were probably more usefully equipped than physicians for the work they had to do.
R. . . . for their work.

Growths in the more distal parts of the stomach tend to be more readily detectable on barium-meal examination, and gastroscopy is less likely than radiology to detect lesions in this situation.
R. Growths in the more distal parts of the stomach tend to be more readily detected by barium-meal examination than by gastroscopy.

Hypertelorism is usually associated with mental defect, although this is not invariably so.
R. Hypertelorism is usually but not invariably associated with mental defect.

Acute myocardial infarction varies greatly in severity from patient to patient.
Omit "from patient to patient."

Since 1823 we and our contributors have rashly offered much advice about how to improve medical education.
R. . . . advice on ways to improve . . .

There has been a long controversy about whether or not hyperthyroidism can by itself cause congestive heart failure.
R. Whether hyperthyroidism can by itself cause congestive heart failure has long been controversial.

All

They had all had much previous treatment.
R. All had had . . .

Both

Aspirin has two actions, both analgesic and antipyretic.

This sentence is ungrammatical. It says that each of the two actions is analgesic and antipyretic.

R. . . . two actions—analgesic and antipyretic.

> *It was at Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow I may figuratively say of that religious edifice immortalized by Chaucer which was anciently the resort of Pilgrims from the remotest corners of—in short in the immediate neighbourhood of the cathedral.*

Mr Micawber could not get as far as saying "*quite close to* the cathedral'

Even the best writers are sometimes guilty *Listen to this* dreadful sentence by Trollope

> She looked as though she knew well how to defend herself if any over zeal on the part of her lover should ever induce him to violate the sanctum of her feminine retirement (*The Three Clerks*)

In simpler words ' to go into her bedroom

With this compare the following

> Until 1935 any woman who was normally confined ran the appalling risk of being cut short in her prime by the dreaded *scourge of puerperal infection.*
>
> R normally confined risked death from puerperal infection.

But while you should avoid all forms of redundancy particularly the repetition in other words of what you have already said, you must not push your desire for brevity to the extreme of laconism, with dry bare statements of fact that lack polish and do not make for agreeable reading Such a style, if practised in every-day speech would reduce conversation to the monosyllabic questions and answers of our primitive ancestors The finest literature is not to be found in the archives of telegraph offices Moreover do not crowd too *many ideas into one sentence.* Give them plenty of room

Attempts have been made to divide the forms that verbosity takes into three groups pleonasm tautology and circumlocution (or periphrasis) The O E.D defines these as follows

Pleonasm (lit superfluity) the use of more words in a sentence than are necessary to express the meaning

Tautology (lit. the same word) the repetition (especially in the immediate context) of the same word or phrase, or of the same idea or statement in other words, usually a fault of style.

Circumlocution round-about expression, the use of more words than are necessary *Periphrasis* is the Greek equivalent of circumlocution

From the above definitions it will be seen that the distinction

between these terms is by no means clear-cut. Between pleonasm and circumlocution there is a difference in scale The former is applied to redundant words in a sentence, the latter to general redundant expression. Tautology is perhaps in a class apart in that it means repetition of the same idea in different words. In the following examples I have adopted this classification, but in studying them the reader should bear in mind the vagueness of the distinction.

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R advice on ways to improve

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R Whether hyperthyroidism can by itself cause congestive heart failure has long been controversial.

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They had all had much previous treatment.
R: All had had

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R. two actions analgesic and antipyretic.

In (with) regard to; In (with) respect of

These woolly expressions should be avoided. It will be observed that many of the following examples are faulty in other ways

With regard to the remaining cases several striking features emerge.
R In the remaining (Comma unnecessary)

The clause in the Health Service Act which says in respect of teaching hospitals that the Minister
R The clause Act which deals with the teaching hospitals says that

They also differ in the state of advance of the disease, and in respect of the individual susceptibility *towards a particular drug*
R They also differ in the stage which the disease has reached, and in their susceptibility towards a particular drug (*Susceptibility* must be individual.)

It is hardly too much to say that in respect of the more serious disorders the face of dermatology has been changed by this new method of treatment.
R to say that in the more

We should like to call attention to a certain amount of confusion which exists with respect to estimates of the incidence of hyaline-membrane disease among premature infants.
R We wish to call attention to confusion in estimates of

The relative importance of the factors influencing renal tubular function, with respect to salt and water excretion, is difficult to assess.
R of the factors influencing salt and water excretion by the renal tubules is difficult to assess.

In the following the writer is not discussing septic fingers

In the matter of fingers the situation is entirely different.
R In fingers the situation

The next examples are also marred by indirect expression (p. 95)

There was no significant difference in respect of degree of recovery and diagnosis between those who replied, and those who did not reply
R In diagnosis and in the degree of recovery those who replied did not differ significantly from those who did not reply (Comma unnecessary)

It is doubtful whether as regards antibacterial activity there is much difference between these four compounds.
R It is doubtful whether these four compounds differ much in antibacterial activity

For although it is relatively easy to insure that two samples are

matched in respect of such features as sex and age, it is conceivable that there are other less obvious differences.

R For although it is easy to ensure that the two samples are matched in sex and age, less obvious differences may exist. (The comma after *for* is unnecessary *relatively* is meaningless and *ensure* should be *ensure*.)

There has been considerable divergence of opinion in respect of its incidence.

R: Opinions on its incidence have varied greatly

As to

There is still a little uncertainty as to whether some albumin escapes from the glomeruli.

R Whether some albumin escapes from the glomeruli is uncertain.

They do not provide clues as to why

R: They do not suggest any reason why

The point as to whether the valve is "technically suitable" is also worthy of consideration.

R Whether the valve is technically suitable should also be considered. (Inverted commas are superfluous, p. 169.)

With regard to and *as to* are sometimes needed at the beginning of a sentence when the writer wants to develop an aspect of the subject that he has mentioned earlier and also when he wishes to dismiss its importance or confute a contention.

It

The following two sentences occur in the same paragraph

Protein formation is controlled by the growth hormone of the anterior hypophysis and *it* is influenced particularly by

In the young developing animal it not only increases the rate of oxygen consumption but *it* also increases the overall protein content.

Omit the *its* in italics.

Of

In the following the *ofs* should have been omitted

All of the evidence so far established

Almost all of these patients were helpless.

All of the chapters show

Same

Nasal and skin swabs were taken in the same way as described by H. and H.

R: [illegible]

That

That is often redundant after *think*, *believe*, *consider*, etc., except when followed by a subordinate clause. "I think he will die." "I think that unless he is operated on he will die."

Redundant Tail-pieces

An adjective or phrase is sometimes followed by an abstract noun, usually denoting class. "Red in colour" "Three feet in length" 'Circular in shape.' Such words are quite unnecessary and only weaken the effect. The words most frequently misused in this manner are *character* and *nature*

> This condition is of a chronic character
> R This condition is chronic.
>
> The internal weight bearing system in the proximal end of the femur was believed to be compressive in nature. (Omit *in nature*.)

Other examples are

> *The evidence suggests that there has been a disturbing increase* in penicillin-resistant staphylococci. Interest lies in the *reasons for this and in the measures to be taken to counteract the* trend.
> R Interest lies in the reasons for it and in the measures which should be taken to counteract it.
>
> Surgical intervention is required more often in treatment.

Where else could it have been required?

UNNECESSARY REPETITION OF A WORD ALREADY USED

> Numerous *compounds* have been discovered which affect transmission in the sympathetic division of the autonomic system. Most, if not all, of these compounds have been used.
> R Most, if not all, have been used

TAUTOLOGY

Tautology is a very easy mistake to make. One of our most distinguished authors, noted for the excellence of his English, writes

> After five days they reached a point beyond which they could go no further (*Beyond* and *further* are tautological.)

An eminent member of our profession may therefore be excused for writing

> We still need recognition to face the difficulties of our old age and its final termination.

Simple, but common, examples of tautology are "The reason is because" (R The reason is that") "The cause is due to" (omit *due to*) "The reason is due to" (omit *due to*")

The new remedies are powerful drugs with powerful actions.

They could hardly be powerful if their actions were not powerful.

R: The new remedies are powerful.

There are in existence a large number of

Are and *in existence* convey the same idea.

R There are many

Professor H himself did not personally approve of modern tendencies.

He could hardly have approved impersonally

The diameter of the duct was measured by the use of callipers.

Measure and *use* convey the same idea.

R. was measured with callipers.

Chlorothiazide is effective in increasing urinary and sodium secretion.

R: Chlorothiazide increases

May I just mention an aside here and say that the most effective point

Just mention and *aside* convey the same idea so also do *mention* and *say*

R May I just mention that

One great consequence arising from the advances of science

R One great consequence of the advances

In their training and approach the doctor and priest inevitably differ But they share a common concern for their patient.

Things shared must be held in common.

R But they have this in common—a concern for their patient.

They (i e. these books) also share a common defect—each should have been very much more effective as two books.

R Each of these two books would have been effective as two books. (See Subjunctive mood, p. 70.)

Much of the difference of opinion on the work dealing with coronary anastomoses has probably arisen due to differences in technique.

Has arisen and *due to* convey the same idea. R *arisen from*.

As with other observers, we agree that there appears little to choose

As and *agree* convey the same idea.

R We agree with other observers

After an initial control period during which the patients received their appropriate doses of insulin, aspirin therapy was then started.

After and *then* convey the same idea. Omit *then*

CIRCUMLOCUTION (OR PERIPHRASIS)

In the following the reader will note how easily economy in words can be achieved by avoiding circumlocution

There cannot be said to be a typical naked-eye appearance.
R A typical naked-eye appearance does not exist.

We do not wish here to do more than show
R: Here we are content to show

The rise might be explained as due to
R The rise might be ascribed to

It is likely that this effect is due to
R This effect is probably due to

S expressed to me the opinion that
R S told me he thought that

Many can be treated on an out-patient basis.
R Many can be treated as out-patients.

As the result of these examinations it became evident that
R From these examinations it was evident that

It was due to the fact that
R It was because

We have had in use for six months an apparatus
R For six months we have used

She was found to have a highly vascular bone lesion.
R She had a highly

There appears to be a considerable patient-to-patient variation.
R Patients vary widely

Below is an instance of gross circumlocution In the correction I have retained the perfect tense though the present tense would have been better Compare the two versions carefully

Ascites may occur in carcinoma of the breast due to intra abdominal metastases. In the majority however, the development of ascites is part of the general picture of malignant disease and the main direction of the treatment has been to effect an alteration in the hormone state of the patient. To this end the first step has been the administration of oestrogens or androgens, according to the age of the patient, and in some cases has resulted in improvement, with reduction of intra abdominal fluid and even

complete disappearance of the ascites. In those cases which have not responded to the administration of oestrogens or androgens, or have ceased to respond, hormonal surgery has been considered, either by adrenalectomy or hypophysectomy or by cutting the stalk of the hypophysis. There are individual cases where ascites has been controlled by each of these procedures.

R. In carcinoma of the breast intra-abdominal metastases may cause ascites. In most, however ascites is part of general dissemination, and the main object of treatment is to alter the hormonal state. The first step is to give oestrogens or androgens (according to age). Some patients have improved, fluid has been reduced and even disappeared. In patients who have not responded or have ceased to respond, hormonal surgery has been performed—adrenalectomy or hypophysectomy or cutting the stalk of the hypophysis—by all of which the ascites has sometimes been controlled.

141 words have been reduced to 90 with, I think, a gain in clarity and no loss in meaning. Note, incidentally the incorrect use of *considered* and *individual*.

VI

Grammar (1)

"Then you should say what you mean" the March Hare went on. "I do," Alice hastily replied "at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing you know"

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter "Why you might as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'"

Alice in Wonderland.

GRAMMAR AND IDIOM

Language is a means of communicating facts and ideas from one mind to another From the yells and grunts of primitive cave man an elaborate system of inflexions declensions, and conjugations was gradually evolved whereby the form of each word was modified according to its context. This system was carried to its highest pitch by the Greeks and Romans who succeeded in expressing philosophic concepts, dramatic emotions legislative enactments and religious dogma with a precision never since equalled

The English language is a compound of words of Germanic (including Anglo-Saxon) origin and words derived directly or through the French from Greek and Latin This is partly because Latin was for a long time the language of science and religion, and French the language of the Court and partly because Anglo-Saxon, being no more than a folk language was incapable of expressing ideas of any complexity In most of the sentences that we use the smaller words are Germanic and the larger ones Graeco-Roman When medicine began to be written in English it was compelled to adopt this dual system. Restriction to Anglo-Saxon could take it no further than simple statement such as He had a pain in his head and belly ache, *he retched and spued*

The classical languages suffered from one fault—rigidity

There was only one way of saying a thing From this rigidity modern English emancipated itself by almost completely suppressing the system of inflexions (in Latin the source of so much misery to schoolboys) by substituting prepositions and auxiliary verbs, and by permitting variation in the order of words in a sentence. It was thus that it acquired its incomparable flexibility and adaptability

This was enhanced by the introduction of Idiom. An idiom is a word or phrase which is peculiar to a language and which cannot be translated into another language. It may or may not defy grammar and logic. For instance it is neither ungrammatical nor illogical to say "Aim to reach," but we say "aim at reaching" On the other hand to say It's only me" is to commit a grammatical offence. Idiom allows us to express subtle shades of meaning For example we may say "The committee considers" or "the committee consider" according to the context. Idiom enables us to use the devices of euphemism and hyperbole and to express without any suggestion of insincerity emotions that we are far from feeling We "fear" such and such a thing may happen when there is nothing to be frightened about—an expression that goes still further in colloquial speech. We are frightfully sorry or "terribly anxious." Idiom permeates English through and through, and gives it spice without it, both conversation and literature would be intolerably dull. By its use we succeed paradoxically in conveying our meaning to our compatriots at least, by not really meaning what we say and by not saying what we really mean.

Idioms arise in several ways. Some date from the distant past. Some have been coined in recent times or are being coined in our time either by writers whose names are unknown or by those whose standard of English is generally acknowledged to be good. But whatever their origin may be, they are accepted because they are found to be apt, and because they fill gaps that previously existed in our means of communication. Though some idioms pass into circulation immediately others are accepted less readily For instance, the use of "contact" as a verb was at first repugnant to purists, as indeed it still is to many of them. But what a useful word it is! It is at least more elegant than "get into touch with," and it leaves

the way open for the choice of the means of communication—interview, letter, or telephone—in a way not achieved by any other word

The acceptability of new expressions applies especially to the flood that is now pouring in from America. Many of these are thought, at least by some people, as objectionable intrusions offensive to ear and eye. At the same time we cannot withhold our admiration for the remarkable genius that the Americans display in the invention of apt and picturesque language Let me give but one example—a term with which this book is largely concerned Faulty language used by Government departments is often called officialese." Ivor Brown has suggested pudder a word used by Shakespeare. To my mind these are surpassed in descriptiveness by the American word gobbledygook While jealously guarding the purity of our linguistic heritage we should be prepared to welcome verbal immigrants that definitely facilitate the communication of ideas

Through its free use of idiom, therefore, the English language is governed by usage rather than by strict adherence to the rules of grammar Where then does grammar come in? The grammar schools of today retain the name of the schools whose primary function was the teaching of Latin grammar Indeed, before the sixteenth century the term grammar was confined to Latin grammar The idea that English should be subject to grammatical rules came much later In the *Authorised Version of the Bible* and in the works of Shakespeare we find gross errors The wages of sin is death, There is pansies, How agrees the devil and thee about thy soul and many others At a later period Dean Swift fulminated against the degeneration of language and in 1817–19 that stout hearted Englishman William Cobbett, found time, among his many other activities to write his *Grammar of the English Language* the first book on the subject intelligible to the working man Since then war has been waged between those who hold out for the dominance of grammar and those who go to the length of saying that grammar no longer serves any purpose and that meaning is all that matters

The truth is to be found somewhere between these extreme views. Language is a living thing that constantly adapts itself

to the needs of society: the changes it undergoes reflect the tempo of society. After remaining almost static for several centuries Western civilization has entered upon a period of ever-growing dynamism. It thirsts for new words to express the increasing complexity of its thoughts. To this, language is compelled to respond. It would be trite to say that it is a good servant but a bad master. What is important is to realize that, like a good servant, it must be granted reasonable freedom compatible with the proper performance of its function. It must be obedient to the fundamental canons of good taste, brevity and lucidity.

The strict observance of grammatical rules may lead to stilted and pedantic language. But to break the rules may mean committing glaring grammatical errors unacceptable even to those readers who do not unduly worry themselves about the niceties of the English language. Neglect of grammar would inevitably lead to chaos. Grammar is like the piece of linen upon which a pattern is embroidered. Though eventually hidden from view its function persists: without it there would be nothing but a jumble of multicoloured wool. In order properly to convey his meaning the writer must take the trouble to learn and observe the rules.

To discuss grammar comprehensively is beyond the scope of this book. In this and the succeeding chapter I shall confine myself to those aspects of the subject that seem especially prone to cause difficulty.

NOUNS

Number: False Concord

Of all grammatical errors, false concords are the easiest to make. Even Allbutt is not blameless:

> Yet a run of such phrases, by their jolts and stops, are as wearisome to persons of sustained thinking as the longer period or paragraph may be to the childish.

Homer nods. Since it is elementary knowledge that the existence of two subjects demands a plural verb and that the use of *and* creates two subjects, it is worth considering how the errors come to be made. In short sentences they are due to sheer carelessness.

The evidence and the evidence of history is very convincing

Understanding and team-work is not enough.

The instruction and use of unnecessary jargon seems

R The instruction given and the use of unnecessary jargon seem

The methods of defining the periods of initiation of cure and recovery *has certain defects*

The objective of medical education are not always very sharply in focus.

Sometimes the writer's mind is attracted away from the subject to another word or group of words, as in the following

From the subject, *case notes* to *each*

The case-notes of each of these patients was compared with

From the subject, *maturity and understanding* to *statement*

The statement implies that the maturity and understanding of marital problems is something picked up as the years roll by

From the subject, *presence* to *exophthalmos and oedema*

The presence of *pulmonary osteo-arthropathy in a patient* with severe malignant exophthalmos and localized oedema of the legs support the view that the pituitary gland is closely associated with this phenomenon.

The error is all the easier to make if too many ideas are crowded into one sentence In the following the mind has been attracted from the subjects of the subordinate clause, *elimination* and *halving* to the subject of the main clause, *smallness* of which *has* is not the predicate

The smallness of this group proves that the virtual elimination of eclampsia and the halving of the number of cases of hypertension associated with proteinuria (over a period of ten years) has not been achieved by frequent resort to the induction of premature labour

R Over a period of ten years eclampsia has been almost eliminated and hypertension associated with proteinuria halved. These results, as the smallness of this group proves, have not been achieved by frequent induction of premature labour

In the following the writers have been led astray through using indirect expression (p 95)

Severe damage to the pons, medulla and hypothalamic area are produced.

R is produced. Or better The pons medulla and hypothalamic area are severely damaged.

After a single injection there was usually oedema, pain and increased blood-flow through the limb for ten or fourteen days.

R. A single infection usually caused oedema, pain and increased blood-flow lasting for ten to fourteen days.

In September there was found a sharp, systolic murmur at the apex of the dilated heart, moist rales at the apex of both lungs, a firm palpable liver and spleen.

R In September a sharp systolic murmur was heard at the apex of the dilated heart, and moist rales were heard at the bases of both lungs the liver and spleen were palpable and firm.

One out of twelve people in this country will be admitted to a mental hospital during their lifetime.

The difficulty could have been overcome by writing

One twelfth of the people during their lifetime.

The use of singular and plural in the same sentence is unpardonable

These recommendations no longer include precise details but urges schools to find means

The rules governing grants to boys and girls who win State scholarships have been greatly unfair to many parents, because of its means test.

Papillomata arising in the urinary and alimentary tracts, the ducts of the breast, and the skin has been studied to determine what relation they have to cancer

Notwithstanding the rule that *and* creates two subjects, the verb may be put in the singular when the subjects are practically identical

Complete rehabilitation of paraplegic patients and their full reintegration into society is possible only if

A better construction would have been

Complete rehabilitation and social re-integration of paraplegic patients is

When a singular noun is followed by parenthetic additions introduced by *with*, *together with*, *as well as*, the verb is singular "This with the other evidence I have given proves " "The vomiting as well as the diarrhoea has improved "

When subject and complement are interchangeable the verb agrees with the noun that precedes it. "More nurses are the only remedy" "The only remedy is more nurses." If the latter offends, it can be written "The only remedy is the provision of more nurses." "What is of special importance is the changes that the blood undergoes." In questions, the verb agrees with the noun that follows it "What strength are the solutions?"

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ABSTRACT NOUNS

Nouns expressing state or condition are usually though by no means invariably singular

> The paraesthesiae in the hands were not relieved.

Paraesthesia is of only one kind.

> R. (either) the paraesthesia was, (or) the areas of paraesthesia were

> Patients with a low tolerance of discomforts and frustrations are those likely to be addicts.
> R. discomfort and frustration.

A friend who read this asked "If you can have comforts, why can t you have discomforts?" My answer is that we are here dealing with discomforts in the abstract.

> With large doses deliria with auditory and visual hallucinations may occur.

The error becomes obvious if a cognate but less technical term is substituted. The foregoing would read "With large doses madnesses with "

> R. delirium (or periods of delirium)

Similarly

> These factors are also important for the progress of other kinds of patients, though emphases are placed differently
> R. emphasis is placed

Strictly speaking, nouns expressing state should not take the indefinite article as in

> A delirium may follow withdrawal.

but the rule is not invariable.

Abstract scientific words ending in *s* such as *physics, genetics orthopaedics* are usually singular

> The genetics of anencephalus have been discussed.
> R. has

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Many people have difficulty in deciding whether collective words such as "committee," "group" "number" "council" are singular or plural. The answer is that it depends on whether one thinks of them as corporate Bodies, or as the sum of the individuals who compose them. For example "a

None

Although it is a shortened form of *no one* or *not one*, *none* takes either the singular or the plural, more usually the latter The following is correct

> This poses some problems of academic organisation which allow of compromise solutions none of which are entirely satisfactory

In the following the singular is correct, but the construction is clumsy

> Eight deaths occurred among the 48 patients, none of which was due to mercury
> R of the 48 deaths none was due to mercury

As with nouns singular and plural must not be used in the same sentence

> None of these three persons was overweight, so their appetite centres had apparently no difficulty in gearing their food intake to their low metabolic turnover
> R None were overweight (or better) None of these persons were overweight, so the appetite centres of each had no difficulty

One or more takes the plural

> When one or more of the following complications was present.
> R were.

More than one is singular when followed by a noun, but otherwise invariably plural More than one attack is rare.' More than one attend every day

Negative Lists

These take the singular The following is correct

> There was no abnormal bleeding alopecia, gastro-intestinal disturbance or other toxic or undesirable effect of P E.S.

As follows

Not *as follow*, however many followers there may be.

Compound Words

Words made up of a noun and an adjective take the s at the end *Spoonfuls* not *spoonsful*

The perinatal mortality cannot be kept to a minimum unless amniotomy is regarded as a serious surgical operation to be performed by an experienced operator in the operating theatre neither can it be achieved without the use of the physiological oxytocic drip.

The long sentence "The perinatal ... theatre" cannot serve as an antecedent to it. An antecedent must be a substantive.

R: ... in the operating theatre, and unless the physiological drip is used.

One must not be used in conjunction with pronouns such as *I he she*

As someone who has recently worked both in my teaching hospital and in a few peripheral hospitals I should like to comment on this subject.

R Having recently worked both ...

RELATIVE PRONOUNS AND SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

Who, which, that

When a relative pronoun is the subject of a subordinate clause its number and person are those of the subject of that clause, not those of the subject of the main sentence. "Jones is one of those who advise gastrectomy" *Advise* is correct because it must agree with *those* and not with *one* A difficulty arises when a relative pronoun is followed by a parenthetic clause. Consider these two sentences (1) "The patient whom I saw yesterday" (2) "The patient whom I thought had appendicitis." The first is of course correct the second is incorrect and should read "The patient who I thought had appendicitis." *I thought* is parenthetic to the clause "who had appendicitis." Incidentally the verb *to think* being intransitive, cannot have an object.

A relative pronoun must follow its antecedent without any interpolation

M. spoke on the use of the vaginal speculum, without examination by which he regarded no gynaecological examination as complete.

R M. spoke on the use of the vaginal speculum which he regarded as an essential part of gynaecological examination.

committee was appointed ' is correct because the emphasis is *on the appointment* rather than on the members On the other hand, in the committee were unable to agree, the plural is *preferable because the reader visualizes the members of the* Committee as having broken up into two or more parties *Between these extremes neither the singular nor the plural is* incorrect, but the use of the singular is commoner because, *fortunately for society, reports usually indicate agreement* among the members, as in In an interim report the committee declares , *The Council recommends* that , " The Committee is firmly of the opinion that "

Group. Singular or plural according to preference.

A group of euthyroid patients of different ages were reviewed.

The plural is correct, as the singular would have been.

Series is singular

" This series is instructive."

Number, when part of a plural subject is plural, but when it *stands in its own right, so to speak, it is* singular A large number of epileptics attend daily " The number of epileptics *is small* "

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

As William Cobbett pointed out writers, in using personal pronouns *he, she they* and especially *it*, must make sure that there is a proper antecedent with which the pronoun agrees in number

Nansen spent three years of his life drifting across the North Polar Ice, one of it with a single companion.

The antecedent is years, but seems to be it

R one of them with

The Welsh spent more money on butter than anyone else *but* much less on eggs than the national average In Scotland *they* spent much more money on cakes and biscuits.

The writer says that the Welsh who live in Scotland spent much more. He means that the Scots spent much more

The present paper reports a method which is rapid and reproducible and permits the quantitative assay of fibrinolytic activity of whole blood within a few hours.

Here the second *and* seems to unite the adjectives *rapid and reproducible* with the verb *permits*

R1 which is rapid and reproducible and which permits

But a better construction would have been

which is not only rapid and reproducible but also permits

Although the practice is not wrong it is inadvisable to make a relative pronoun refer to a clause

The range of minimal and maximal values (i.e. of haemoglobin levels in old people) is greater than that seen in younger age-groups which suggests that subjects were included who had diseases other than those common to the ageing process.

The above needs reconstruction.

The range of minimal and maximal values of haemoglobin levels is greater in old than in younger people. This suggests that

Extensive chemical burns are fortunately rare which speaks well for the safety precautions taken.

R are fortunately rare. This speaks well

Who and *whom* refer to persons, *which* to things, *that* to both persons and things But when patients are called cases they lose their personality "The patients whom," "The cases which."

Another term is required for cases in whom narrowing of the orifice follows an inadequate valvotomy

R cases in which or patients in whom

What

When *what* stands for *that which* or *those which* it is a combination of an antecedent and a relative *pronoun*. "*I know what* (that which) you mean." In formal writing care is needed

The figures quoted are far in excess of what has been found at autopsy

R in excess of those found (plural to agree with *figures*)

The number of *what* when the complement is plural is debatable. Fowler and Partridge say that in such cases *what* is singular "What *is required* is houses at rents that the people can pay" They would thus approve of the following

What concerns me is Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and the rarer entero-colitis.

And who; and which

A clause beginning with these words is permissible only under two conditions it must follow a relative clause, and the two clauses must have the same antecedent "Patients with wounds discharging freely and who are not free from pain" is incorrect because *with wounds discharging freely* is not a relative clause. "Patients whose wounds are discharging freely and who are not free from pain" is correct because here we have two relative clauses having the same antecedent, *patient*. Even so, it is better to avoid *and who, and which* by changing the construction "Patients with freely discharging wounds who are ' The following is an example of two relative pronouns with different antecedents

> The basis of this report is atherosclerotic occlusion of the first part of the subclavian artery in a patient which caused gangrene of the fingers of the left hand and in whom, after confirmation of the site of the block by aortography thrombo-endarterectomy produced a dramatic improvement in the symptoms and signs.

The antecedent of *which* is *occlusion artery*, the antecedent of *whom* is *patient*. *In whom* therefore cannot be joined to *which* by *and*. A further fault is the interpolation of *in a patient* between *which* and its antecedent. Note also that the report, being a description cannot have a basis

> R This report concerns a patient suffering from gangrene of the fingers of the left hand due to atherosclerotic occlusion of the first part of the subclavian artery Thrombo-endarterectomy performed after the site of the block had been confirmed by aortography dramatically improved the symptoms and signs.

Repetition and Omission of Relative Pronouns

When relative clauses that are similar in their construction are joined by *and* the second relative pronoun should be omitted The man who is overweight and who has a high blood pressure, R overweight and has

> I personally owe much to X who not only inspired us in his lectures and practical classes but who also made us write essays for him once a week.

Let us hope this is not typical of the effects of the instruction

> R: classes but also

On the other hand when *and* seems to join different parts of speech the relative pronoun should be repeated

In 2 *which* makes the clause apply to all the wards. The clause could be omitted without affecting the sense of the sentence. It is non-defining and could be put within commas

The wards, which were open to visitors, were well ventilated.

In 1 the clause could not be put within commas.

Apart from that slow muddled state of forgetful inefficiency that we might call fuddledness, the chloral addict

That ... *fuddledness* is parenthetic it does not affect the principal clause. *That* should therefore be *which*. (The first *that* should be *the*.) In the following on the other hand the subordinate clauses are not parenthetic but are essential to the principal clause. In each, therefore, *which* should be *that*

The present prescription charge is a tax which, besides stimulating the wrong incentive, has proved disappointing finally

Note the faulty position and choice of the adverb (p. 86)

R ... has ultimately proved disappointing.

Not a few authorities which thought themselves secure have had salutary shocks.

The knee was normal apart from the occasional discomfort which the patient had experienced before.

R ... that it had previously caused.

The rise in the secretion of free histamine in the urine which is found after ingestion of a meat meal is similar in amount and duration

For a further discussion on this subject see Punctuation (p. 162)

Gowers on the other hand says that it is more natural to treat *what* as plural I agree with Gowers, and in the above sentence would prefer What concern me are , but a better construction would have been The diseases that concern me are '

The Impersonal "Whose"

It is widely believed that *whose* can relate only to human beings Its non human use was however, recognized by Milton

> Of Man s first disobedience and the fruit
> Of that *forbidden* tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe.

The alternative to *whose* is the clumsy *of which*

> from handling a book the title of which is likely to become

But in the following, *whose* is not incorrect, but *of which* would have been better in order to bring a stronger emphasis on *study*

> Neither approach has been *particularly helpful* in the practical management of renal disease, whose study has on the whole progressed

DEFINING AND NON DEFINING CLAUSES

That and Which

This is the house that Jack built. Why not This is the house which Jack built ? There is a subtle distinction worthy of careful consideration The first is a defining clause the second a non-defining clause. A defining clause is in Partridge s words an integral and irremovable part of the sentence and cannot be put in parentheses A non-defining clause can always be put in parentheses and its omission would not make the sentence senseless A defining clause should be introduced by *that* a non-defining clause by *which* Consider these two sentences

> 1 The wards that were open to visitors were well ventilated.
> 2. The wards which were open to visitors were well ventilated.

In 1, *that* limits the wards to those that were open to visitors, it makes the clause a defining one There were other wards, these may or may not have been well ventilated.

the hills when the quoter wrote he should have written " is as old as the hills."

> This rise is not readily accounted for on a basis of marrow population, nor was it merely due to cessation of X-ray therapy
> R: nor is it (Or better) This rise is not readily accounted for either by marrow population or by cessation

Simple past tense refers to an event that has been completed, perfect tense to an event continuing up to the present

> The high incidence of anaemia in women attending the antenatal clinics of X Hospital was recognized for many years.

This suggests that the high incidence is no longer recognized.

> R: has been recognized

In the following there is confusion of both tense and voice

> It has been widely used and given much information on liver pathology as well as greatly improving the accuracy of diagnosis.
> R It has been widely used, it has given much information on liver pathology and it has greatly improved

Avoid the double past tense, (1) after *hope fear intend* etc. "He intended to have come" should be "He intended to come." (2) after a past conditional. "I should have liked to have included" should be "I should have liked to include."

A distinction must be made between the simple past tense and the past tense with a suggestion of the future. The following refers to an event that took place sixty years ago

> Material for histological study did not become available in these cases and though in the ensuing half-century
> R was not available

In the following, sequence has been ignored

> I understand that when trichlorethylene was introduced, very little pharmacological evidence was accumulated.

The accumulation must have preceded the introduction.

> R evidence had been accumulated
> (Comma unnecessary.)

> The influenza epidemic that started in Asia and had spread in a few months to both hemispheres

The spread came after not before, the start.

> R and spread

Shall, Will

In the simple future *shall* is used with the first person, *will* with the second and third persons. (Scottish readers please

VII

Grammar (2)

"They've a temper [said Humpty Dumpty] some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say'

Through the Looking Glass.

VERBS

TENSE

The correct use of tense is simply a matter of paying attention to the time and sequence of the events described. When a sentence describes two or more events occurring at the same time they must be expressed in the same tense.

> Several factors might act together or separately and different factors may produce the same end-result.
>
> R Several factors may (*Might* is the past tense of *may*)

Similarly

> It is at this juncture of the clinical enquiry that a false step might be taken.
>
> R may be taken.
>
> (*Enquiry* should be *inquiry* p. 56.)

> There are therefore good reasons for thinking that malnutrition might arise from an altered flora in the intestine
>
> R May arise

> Spontaneous bleeding occurs in cases of blood dyscrasia, and sometimes *will* result from tumour invasion.
>
> R and sometimes results

Only if the present refers to an established truth can it be used in conjunction with the past. He did not realize that the patient was moribund." He did not know that morphia can be used

> *As B. and B. said in 19[illegible] the problem was as old as the hills.*

B and B. probably said The problem is as old as the hills" The quoter agrees But since the problem was still as old as

> If you would allow the choice of treatment to be made on a member of your own family then it is quite ethical
> R then it would be quite ethical.

Apart from being ungrammatical mixing the moods has an inelegant effect

> An increase would be necessary and even then it is doubtful if sufficient numbers would be available.

Reconstruct thus

> An increase would be necessary and even then sufficient numbers might not be available.

Though *were* is past tense in the indicative, in the subjunctive it may be present or future. "If I were able," i.e. now "If he were to see it three years hence."

Should; Would

Writers may be consoled on learning that these words were a stumbling-block to no less a writer than Oscar Wilde. His difficulty is understandable. The rule is to use *should* for the first person and *would* for the second and third. Thus for-

> I would like to acknowledge the help
> R I should like

Yet we find Charles Lamb writing

> Though I would not go so far with some good catholics abroad as to shut players altogether out of consecrated ground
> (*Tragedies of Shakespeare*)

In the first person the choice is complicated by the slight difference in meaning *Should* may convey the idea of *ought to*, which is absent from *would*. "I should go because I am president." "I would go if I *were able*." It must be left to the writer to decide which is his exact meaning In the second and third persons *should* always means *ought to* or *is likely to* "He should know"

> It would be pertinent to inquire who would be appointed to the task.
> R who should be

The foregoing distinction between *should* and *would* is somewhat blurred by the recent introduction into common parlance of the phrase "I wouldn t know" Between this phrase and "I don t know" there is a shade of difference, for the former implies "I can t be expected to know you must ask someone else." *Would* has two further uses to express diffidence and,

note.) 'I (we) will' means 'I am (we are) determined to.' 'You (he) shall' means 'you (he) may,' or 'you are (he is) allowed to'

THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD

The subjunctive mood denotes 'action or state as conceived (and not as a fact) and is used to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical or prospective event.' (O.E.D.) The special forms of the subjunctive are only two: *be* in all persons and both singular and plural numbers of the present tense, e.g. 'If he be', and *were* in the singular of the past tense, e.g. 'If he were.' Otherwise the subjunctive can be distinguished from the indicative only by the auxiliaries *may*, *might*, *should* and *would*. *Be*, though becoming obsolete, persists in a few expressions: 'Be that as it may,' in legal documents, and in expressing permission and recommendation: 'I propose he be appointed.'

It is important that the airway is kept clear

Be would have been more appropriate; but this is a case for the infinitive.

R. It is important to keep the airway clear

The essential part of the definition given above is that the subjunctive implies that the action is hypothetical and not factual or even possible. 'O that we were there,' says the carol. 'If he was there I did not see him' is not hypothetical since he may well have been there.

Mr D. taunts me with the *jibe* that I am living in the past. I wish I was.

The writer implies emphatically that he is not living in the past. He should therefore have said *were*.

Both the conditional clause and the main clause must be put in the subjunctive. In the following the conditional clause is in the indicative:

If I am completely uncertain which of the two courses to adopt, I might toss a coin

R. If I were

and in the following by the same writer the main clause is wrongly put in the indicative:

> If you would allow the choice of treatment to be made on a member of your own family then it is quite ethical
> R: then it would be quite ethical.

Apart from being ungrammatical, mixing the moods has an inelegant effect

> An increase would be necessary and even then it is doubtful if sufficient numbers would be available.

Reconstruct thus

> An increase would be necessary and even then sufficient numbers might not be available.

Though *were* is past tense in the indicative, in the subjunctive it may be present or future. "If I were able, i.e. now" "If he were to see it three years hence."

Should; Would

Writers may be consoled on learning that these words were a stumbling-block to no less a writer than Oscar Wilde. His difficulty is understandable. The rule is to use *should* for the first person and *would* for the second and third. Thus for

> I would like to acknowledge the help
> R I should like

Yet we find Charles Lamb writing

> Though I would not go so far with some good catholics abroad as to shut players altogether out of consecrated ground
> (*Tragedies of Shakespeare*)

In the first person the choice is complicated by the slight difference in meaning *Should* may convey the idea of *ought to*, which is absent from *would*. "I should go because I am president." I would go if I were able." It must be left to the writer to decide which is his exact meaning In the second and third persons *should* always means *ought to* or *is likely to* "He should know"

> It would be pertinent to inquire who would be appointed to the task.
> R who should be

The foregoing distinction between *should* and *would* is somewhat blurred by the recent introduction into common parlance of the phrase "I wouldn t know Between this phrase and "I don t know" there is a shade of difference, for the former implies "I can t be expected to know, you must ask someone else." *Would* has two further uses to express diffidence and,

unfortunately, to conceal downright hedging Diffidence is suggested in

> It would seem to me that the structure of sound clinical research is

The writer implies, or seems to imply

If I were asked my opinion, I would say that

Hedging can be detected in the following

> The curve of serial serum transaminase would appear to be

Doubt is already implied in *appear* Then why not say this?

> The curve appears to be
>
> The inhibitory substance would seem to have similar properties to

Here again doubt is sufficiently implied in *seem* Why add to the doubt with *would?*

> R substance seems to have

Without being dogmatic be as definite as the evidence allows Many years ago I asked a colleague who was notorious for his genius in hedging to listen to a patient's heart. Having done so he said Well, I wouldn't exactly say there's a murmur, but I think there may be a niggly sort of a noise."

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

See p 97

ADVERBS

The only difficulty with adverbs concerns their position This is discussed in p 86

ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTION HANGING PARTICIPLE

Absolute construction corresponds to the Latin ablative absolute. The O.E.D defines it as a phrase that stands out of grammatical relation or syntactical construction with other words " It qualifies the substantive that immediately follows it and from which it is separated by a comma It must not have a comma within it. *The patient having been anaesthe-*

tired, an incision was made. " The principal word in the phrase is usually but not always, a present or past participle. Writers often fail to attach it to the substantive that it qualifies. It is then known as a hanging or unattached participle. In some cases this is merely bad English though the meaning is clear but in others it causes obscurity and even nonsense. The error being very common, I give several examples

> Though notoriously difficult to define, most psychiatrists have some fairly uniform concept of what constitutes a psychopathic patient.

Psychiatrists may or may not be difficult to define, but that is not the meaning This is a bad sentence.

> R: Though the term "psychopathic patient" is notoriously difficult to define, most psychiatrists have a fairly uniform concept of its meaning.

> Having reached the stage of proof of subarachnoid bleeding the next step is to establish the effect of compression of the common carotid artery

The stage of proof has been reached not by the next step but by the writer or the persons whom he is advising

> R. subarachnoid bleeding, we must then

> When considering the trunk, there is at first sight just as large a variety of parts that it can play
>
> R: When we consider the trunk we find that

> Having attended all the meetings of the Fellowship of Freedom in Medicine and having read hundreds of letters in the *B.M.J.* it is obvious that
>
> R. From attendance at F.F.M. and from hundreds *B.M.J. I think it is obvious that*

> In taking a history of the patients illness I teach my students that they are eliciting

The history is being taken by the students, not by the writer

> R. I teach my students that in taking a history

> Turning to clinical evidence, R. found that there was no excess of a substance giving the glyoxylic reaction.

From the context it is clear that it is the writer not R. who is turning

> R. From clinical evidence R. found

> Since abandoning the corrodible metals this reaction has almost completely ceased.
>
> R. Now that the corrodible metals have been abandoned

> Encouraged by this experience subsequent patients were given a tumour dose of 6,500 r.

The patients may or may not have been encouraged

R Encouraged by this experience we gave patients

In testing out the drug most patients began with 50 mg three times a day

R In testing out the drug we at first gave most patients

Though not claiming to be a textbook on flight safety or indeed any particular portion thereof, the authors include many internationally recognized experts in their own field

The authors cannot be a textbook

R Though not claiming to have written a textbook

Obscurity is shown by

Taken as an economic proposition, most hospitals have a great store (in hospital beds) of blankets.

This seems to mean

As a measure of economy most hospitals have

Nonsense is shown by

Dyspnoeic at rest, his eyes were bright.

Even when fatal, death is usually due to intercurrent disease particularly infection.

GERUND

A gerund is a verb-noun ending in *ing* or, in Fowler's words, a noun supplying a verb's infinitive or noun-form with cases , e.g I look forward to your coming' Some verbs, adjectives and nouns take the gerund instead of the infinitive Which these are must be learnt since there is no rule, 'Prevent from going but 'forbid to go Capable of performing but able to perform."

They aim to illustrate principles.
R They aim at illustrating (or) Their aim is to illustrate

FUSED PARTICIPLE

This is a ' compound notion formed by the fusion of a noun with a participle. '

Very few medical conditions necessitate an afebrile or nearly afebrile child staying in bed.

Child staying in bed is a fused participle made up of the noun *child* and the participle *staying in bed* The correctness of the

fused participle is a matter of controversy it is best avoided by changing the construction. In the above, *child's staying in bed* would have been more correct, but it would have been better to write

> Very few medical conditions make it necessary to keep an afebrile, or nearly afebrile, child in bed.

> A remarkable story which led to the cause of the syndrome being established
> R which led to the establishment of the cause of the syndrome

> We place great emphasis on the clinical clerk attending his patients throughout the course of their illness.

The emphasis is not on the *clerk* but on his *attending his patients*

> R. clerk's.

When, however the substantive is long and complicated the fused participle is difficult to avoid. Suppose the above had read " on the clinical clerks and dressers attending their patients" this would have been preferable to clerks and dressers "

EVERY EACH, EITHER, NEITHER, NOR

Every always takes the singular

Each always takes the singular except in special phrases such as "They were each given two pints of blood." *Each* should not be used for *both* or *all* when the information refers to both or all the antecedents

> A phlyctenule had appeared in each eye.
> R both eyes.

> In each of the patients and the controls.
> R In all the

> Three cases of rheumatoid arthritis have been described, each ending fatally with intestinal perforation.
> R have been described. All ended

Each is often used unnecessarily

> In each of the five cases where the patient died post-mortem examination was carried out.
> R In the five cases or more simply:
> The five fatal cases were examined post-mortem.

Either takes the singular unless at least one of the subjects is plural. "Either morphia or opium is given." "Either morphia or the barbiturates are given."

Though some authorities frown on the practice, the general opinion is that *either* may be used with more than *two* subjects. "In this question paper either A or B or C must be answered" (If this were stated less explicitly many candidates would certainly misunderstand it.)

Either should not be used for *both*

> The disease is highly infectious either by direct personal contact or by fomites.
> R both by and by
>
> One advantage of either contrivance
> R of both contrivances.

Neither, like *either* takes the singular unless at least one of the subjects is plural

> Neither of these opinions are
> R is.
>
> *Neither meclozine nor cyclizine have been compared to hyoscine.*
> R has.

The following is correct

> Neither published reports nor the *Colindale* records are entirely satisfactory

With *either* and *neither* a difficulty arises when the persons are different Neither he nor I ? is ? am certain.' Either he or I ? goes ? go ' *The rule is to make* the verb agree with the second of the alternatives, but it may be better to change the construction. He is not certain nor am I Either he goes or I go

Neither like either may be used with more than two subjects, but *nor* should precede every subject after the first. 'The urine contained neither sugar nor blood, nor albumen." It would be wrong to write "neither sugar blood nor albumen."

The alternative to *neither* is always *nor* never *or* Consider this sentence

> Neither had glycosuria or elevation of blood-sugar levels when they were admitted to hospital.

Here the rule seems to be contravened but this is not so. The sentence is more complicated than it looks There are two sets of alternatives two patients and two conditions. *Or* is therefore correct If the two patients were discussed separately the sentence would run A had neither glycosuria nor elevation of blood-sugar levels, B had neither glycosuria nor elevation of blood-sugar levels.

Although it is not wrong it is better not to use *neither* instead of *nor* for the alternative to a preceding negative The *Book of Common Prayer* it is true, has

> O Lord deal not with us after our sins
> Neither reward us after our iniquities.

Neither is justified by the superb metre, but the medical writer should not aspire to such heights. In any case, he may land himself in difficulties as in

> Psychiatrists are certainly not immune from self-deception; but neither are experts in social medicine, nor our Great Planners and Medical Politicians.

The juxtaposition of *neither nor* and *and* is inelegant and leads to ambiguity

> R. Psychiatrists, no more than experts in social medicine, our Great Planners, and Medical Politicians, are certainly not immune from self-deception.

Another misuse of *neither* is shown in

> There are two reasons for this, neither given by Professor D It is

The reader expects *nor* after Professor D

> R. neither of which is given by

Should *or* or *nor* follow a negative statement? This presents a nice point. Consider these two sentences

> He does not drink or smoke.
> He does not drink, nor does he smoke.

Both are correct. In the first *does not* is carried through to *smoke*. To write *nor* would create a double negative. In the second the negative in *does not* ends at *drink* A new negative is therefore required.

> Because B C G. cannot help those who are already infected, nor those who will not become infected.

Cannot help is carried through beyond *infected* so that *nor* suggests a double negative. *Nor* should therefore be *or*

> Since I did not possess Willis's *Compleat Anatomy* nor the unexpurgated writings of Hughlings Jackson

Here again *nor* should be *or* because *did not possess* is carried through to *the writings of H J* (*Unexpurgated* is thoroughly bad it means *with objectionable matter not removed*.)

> Though this work has brought us no nearer to a working definition of hypercalciuria, and has shown that it can frequently be

diagnosed on a ward diet, it has shed no light on the physiological mechanism at work nor on the significance of the condition.

Shed no light is carried through to *significance*, therefore R *or*

Or

Make sure that you really intend an alternative

Certainly my house physicians and registrars are very much more capable than I recollect that I or my contemporaries were at their stage.

This is a false alternative. The writer meant himself and his *contemporaries*

CONJUNCTIONS

And

This simple word needs careful handling The distinction between *and* and *but*, though often regarded as a pedantic quibble, is an important one. *And* should not be used to join clauses that have a contrary meaning

Bias is produced by several factors, some of which are well known and can be dealt with, and others are less understood.

And should clearly have been *but* A better construction would have been

several factors. Some of these are well known and can be dealt with others are not so well known. (*Less understood* is not English.)

And should not be used to join sentences whose meaning is remote

J has used the term "posthypoglycaemic encephalopathy" to describe this condition, and two illustrative case histories follow

Though the case histories illustrate the term they have nothing to do with J s use of it.

R this condition. Two illustrative

Instead of joining two sentences with *and* it is always better to make one of them subordinate, especially if it describes a cause or reason

The method is concerned with the labile factor and therefore the blood must be chilled immediately after collection.

The first sentence gives the reason for the second

R Since the method is concerned with the labile factor the blood

And/or is officialese and should be avoided. For "male and/or female patients" write "both male and female patients."

As

Though colloquially used as a preposition followed by the objective case ("as tall as me") *as* is a conjunction and, in writing, should be followed by the nominative case.

As must not be used for *since because*

> As he still believed in manipulation.

As must not be used with *equal*

> The general insurance principles apply with equal force in Great Britain as in the United States.
>
> R apply equally to Great Britain and to the United States.

As if as though, although colloquially taking the indicative "It looks as if it's going to rain," are conditional conjunctions and must be followed by the subjunctive "He looks as if he were expecting someone."

As from is correct in reference to the past but not in reference to the future "The higher rates are payable as from last October" but "the higher rates are payable from next October"

But

The clauses this word unites must be contrary in meaning See *and* above

If

Note the difference between *if* and *whether* "I should like to know if he is worse" implies "If he is not worse I don t want to know" "I should like to know whether he is worse" means "I should like to know whether he is worse or not."

In order that

This takes the subjunctive. "In order that he may"

Like

Like is a preposition To use it as a conjunction is generally regarded as one of the worst literary crimes I am glad to say I have come across only one example

> But some people may feel like the hero of that book did when he was encouraged by his mistress to take a dose.
> R (either) may feel as the hero of that book did (or) may feel like the hero of that book when

Such

The illiterate use of *such* is shown in

> People demand a rallying point for their faith. Ideally such is provided by a physician who
> R Ideally this is

> Necks have been broken playing rugger I had one such in my practice.
> R I had a case of this sort

> "In some instances," he said, the emergency can be recognized as such."

What else could it be recognized as? Presumably the meaning is

> *In some instances it is obvious that one is dealing with an emergency*

> The numbers and sizes of the medical schools in the United Kingdom are such as to make it quite unnecessary to have over crowding if such exists it can be regarded as choice not necessity

This, like so many passages on medical education is full of illiteracies *Such* comes twice *number* and *size* are abstract nouns that need no plural except in such expressions as different sizes of shoes and *overcrowding* the antecedent of the second *such*, cannot be choice or necessity

> R Owing to the number and size of the medical schools in the U K. overcrowding is unnecessary If it exists it is due to choice rather than necessity

Than

Is *than* a conjunction or preposition? If a conjunction it takes the nominative case if a preposition, the objective. Colloqually it is used as a prepostion He is taller than me, and is thus frequently used by the poets

> There is a holier judge than me (*Shelley*)

In prose the matter is disputed The O E.D insists that

than is a conjunction, but allows an exception in *than whom*. Fowler is less definite. Partridge holds it to be a preposition. In the following, therefore, both *we* and *us* may be considered correct

> Should insects survive, because they are 100 times more resistant than us

An obvious way out of the difficulty is to write " than human beings."

Hardly . . . than; scarcely . . . than

In expressions such as the following *than* is incorrect "Hardly had he recovered from the operation than his heart began to fail." R *when*. But *no sooner . . . than* is correct and is preferable to *hardly . . . when*, *scarcely . . . when*.

Thereat, Thereafter, Therefrom

These words are archaic

> People have been struck on the head by cricket balls and died therefrom.
> R. People have been killed by being struck on the head by cricket balls.

> The raw bones are further broken up in crushing mills and thereafter the crushed material is passed
> R. . . . and the crushed material is then passed.

Though (although)

Though is a qualifying conjunction It must not be used for *but*

> Dr John Clement was born at the very beginning of the sixteenth century though the date of his birth is unknown.

The fact that the date of his birth is unknown does not qualify the fact of his having been born at the very beginning of the century

> R. . . . the sixteenth century but the date . . . (or) . . . the sixteenth century The date . . .

Where

Should not be used for *when* as in

> Where the onset was sudden.
> Where the treatment was ineffective.

Whether . . . or whether

The alternative to *whether* is *or*, not *or whether*

In recent years controversy has centred on whether antituberculous or corticosteroid drugs should be used, either alone or in combination or whether no treatment is needed.

Apart from the redundant second *whether* the writer complicates the sentence (1) by expressing the first alternative, *should be used*, in the subjunctive and the second, *is needed*, in the indicative mood, and (2) by interpolating a subsidiary alternative, *antituberculous or corticosteroid*. Complete reconstruction is needed

In recent years the controversy has been between those who advocate antituberculous or corticosteroid drugs, either alone or in combination and those who believe no treatment necessary

Whether or not, Whether or no

Unless emphasis is required as in I shall go whether you like it or not, *or not* and *or no* are tautological

Whether or not treatment by irradiation is possible depends on the degree of damage present in the surrounding tissue.

Impossibility is implied in the possibility

R Whether treatment by

While (whilst)

While means (1) *during the time that* While shepherds watched their flocks by night, (2) *although* While I agree with you up to a point. It should not be used for *and*

The crucial experiment would be to divide an infected closed community into two parts in one of which the disease should be allowed to propagate without hindrance while the other should be purged of excretors as soon as they are discovered

R and the other purged of excretors

PREPOSITIONS

When two adjectives take different prepositions the preposition that follows the first adjective must not be omitted He is as strong if not stronger than his brother" R " as strong as, if not stronger than "

Averse to; Averse from

Fowler and Partridge recommend *to*, Gowers and Vallins recommend *from*. I prefer *from*. So you can take your choice.

Between

Each after *between* is incorrect. For "between each dose" write "between the doses."

Compare with; Compare to

Compare with is usual in discussions of preference, resemblance and difference. "In comparison with other antibiotics aureomycin has the advantage . . ." but *compare to* is permissible in simple comparisons "He compared him to John Hunter."

Consists in; Consists of

Consists in refers to abstractions *consists of* to materials. "His method consists in the immobilization of the affected limb." "Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen."

Different

Different from is the usual modern usage, but *different to* is long established.

Owing to; Due to

Note the difference between these expressions. *Owing to* is both adjectival and adverbial Adjectival "The paralysis of his left leg was owing to a fall in childhood." Adverbial "Owing to a fall in childhood his left leg was paralysed." *Due to* is adjectival only and must be attached to a noun. "The paralysis of his left leg was due to a fall in childhood." It must not be attached adverbially to a clause as in "Due to a fall in childhood his left leg was paralysed."

AMERICAN USAGE

In the following British and American usage differ (American usage is given in brackets.)

Homologous with (to)
Identical with (to)
In contradiction to (with)
In contrast to (with)

OMMISION OF PREPOSITIONS AND CONJUNCTIONS

In certain phrases an essential preposition or conjunction tends to be omitted "It depends whether the temperature has subsided' R 'It depends on " A worse error frequently made is seen in

"Sandy as he was affectionately known, was

To see why the phrase is wrong turn it round It then reads He was affectionately known 'Sandy' Since one cannot say ' as he was affectionately known as" one must say As he was affectionately called

The "round trip," as it was rather vulgarly known, consists of a token anterior and posterior colporrhaphy

(Why vulgarly? Most of us would be glad of a round trip even at the risk of being called vulgar)

Medical writers are by no means the only offenders.

By a B.B C. announcer

Schubert's Great C Major as it is affectionately known.

From *The Times*

Linacre House, as it is known, will take the place of St. Catherine's Society when the latter's undergraduates leave to form the nucleus of the new St. Catherine's College.

This refers to Oxford of all places

The following, also from *The Times*, shows an analogous error

The most interesting of these is 5-hydroxytryptamine, or serotonin as it is often referred to.

Referred to what?

VIII

Syntax

"But they were *in* the well," Alice said to the Dormouse.
"Of course they were," said the Dormouse, "—well in."
Alice in Wonderland.

In every sentence the words differ in their importance. In speaking you can bring out this difference by changing the inflexion of your voice. In writing, apart from such aids as italics (which you must use sparingly), you have to rely on the arrangement of words. Punctuation does not help you. In order that your words may carry conviction you must take pains so to arrange them that the most important (or operative words, to use the modern jargon) are placed where they exert their stress most effectively. You must realize that the arrangement of the words determines the significance of your statement. Compare "He suddenly died" and "He died suddenly." The former emphasizes the fact, the latter the manner of death. You must further realize that the faulty position of a word may impart a meaning that you did not intend. At the same time you must pay due regard to rhythm: the words should flow smoothly, not jerkily.

Usually, but not invariably, the most important word should come last, so that it forms a climax to the sentence. There should be no weak tailing off. Here is the opening sentence of an article:

> Peptic ulcer appears to have been a rare condition before the twentieth century.

This is dull and characterless. The most important word is *rare*; the least important is *condition* (which, in fact, is redundant). Change the sentence to:

> Before the twentieth century peptic ulcer appears to have been rare.

The sentence springs to life.

Words vary not only in their importance but also in their relation to other words in the sentence. Words that are more closely related must therefore not be separated by words less closely related In Herbert Spencer's phrase, "things which are to be thought of together must be mentioned as closely as possible together"

> The proteins of the brain are more resistant in general than those of other organs to depletion under conditions of starvation.

Depletion is closely related to *resistant* but is separated from it by two phrases, *in general* and *than those of other organs* Furthermore, the reader should have been prepared at the beginning of the sentence for the qualifying clause *under conditions of starvation*

> R: Under conditions of starvation the proteins of the brain are in general more resistant to depletion than are those of other organs.

ADVERBS

Adverbs are the parts of speech most liable to misplacement.

CORRECT POSITION

1 If the verb is simple, between the subject and the verb, or immediately after the verb 'It usually happens" He answered promptly

2 If the verb is compound between the auxiliary and the participle

Correct

> Prolapsed discs have recently been excised by H.

Incorrect

> The few cases recorded usually have had co-existing intestinal disease.
> R have usually had

3 After the completed verb The choice between 2 and 3 is a matter partly of usage and partly of emphasis "He invariably operated He spoke intelligibly'

> S and U have favourably reported on the use of neomycin.

Reported favourably would have been better since this brings the emphasis on *favourably*

4. If special emphasis is required at the beginning of the sentence "Usually it occurs on the third day"

5. Immediately before or within the clause that it modifies

> the capacity of polio virus particles to multiply sufficiently in the neurones of the thalamus and adjacent susceptible regions to permit further progression
>
> R: to multiply in the neurones of the thalamus and adjacent susceptible regions sufficiently to permit
>
> It would be strange after fifty years if there were no need to change the technique.

After fifty years is meant to refer not to *strange* but to *change of technique*

> R: It would be strange if, after fifty years, there were

6. In negative sentences, between the negative and the verb

> Surgery is not likely often to be considered if it seems to offer no
>
> R. Surgery is not often likely (or better). It is unlikely that surgery will often be considered.

INCORRECT POSITION

1. After a completed verb if it is followed by a substantive phrase

> If a large embolus obstructs completely a major lower limb vessel
>
> R completely obstructs
>
> Ward rounds tend to fall into the mould of what is sometimes called grandiloquently Socratic teaching.

Socrates was anything but grandiloquent.

> R. grandiloquently called

2. Between a substantive or a relative pronoun and the auxiliary of the verb

> It is the idea which invariably has given rise to the facts.
>
> R which has invariably
>
> The idea often is given no more than lip-service.
>
> R: The idea is often

3. Between two auxiliaries

> Sometimes a change of occupation may be necessary or retirement may even have to be recommended.
>
> R. or even retirement may have to be recommended. (Or better) A change of occupation or even retirement may sometimes have to be recommended.

4 Remote from the verb

We find the basal metabolic rate still of the greatest value.
R: We still find

The conjunction of adverbs may have an inelegant effect

During an epidemic such as last autumn's usually severe cases are seldom referred to a laboratory unless

Usually and *seldom* seem to be a contradiction in terms.

R such as occurred last autumn, severe cases are seldom

ONLY, MERELY, EVEN, ALSO

Fowler mercilessly flays the "precisionists" and "pedants" who insist that *only* must always be placed immediately before the word or phrase it limits, who object to such phrases as 'he only died last week.' I agree. Although it should usually be placed before the word or phrase it limits, this rule should not be strictly adhered to in all contexts. One should have regard to rhythm Hazlitt wrote ' She [Lady Macbeth] is only wicked to gain a great end A modern purist would write ' is wicked only ' Hazlitt's phrasing has the smoother flow But in the following the amended form is perhaps the better

It is only to be found on close examination.
R to be found only on

In others it has only become apparent when the carcass is cut up.
R it has become apparent only when

Union can only take place between the cut upper end of the stump and the severed aspect of the colon.
R Union can take place only between

The position of *only* may affect the meaning For example, 'Life can only be prolonged by gastrectomy This means either that life can be prolonged by gastrectomy but by no other means, or that life can be prolonged but not saved by gastrectomy If the former is meant, R only by gastrectomy can life be prolonged ', if the latter R Gastrectomy can only prolong life or can do no more than prolong life

Only (and *alone*) can immediately follow the word it governs Him only shalt thou serve. "He alone deserves a prize."

Merely and *even* are similar to *only*

Its physiological basis is supposed merely to consist of these mechanisms.

This is not incorrect, but *cannt merely of* would have been better

Also is slightly different because it refers to a statement made earlier

> Creatinuria can be produced also by other methylated steroids.

This wrongly suggests that creatinuria can be something else as well as produced.

> R: can also be produced.

Also should not be used instead of *and* It suggests an afterthought.

> He excised the gall-bladder also the appendix.

TIME

Words, such as *generally* that give a vague expression of time follow the rules described above for adverbs, but words or clauses that specify time accurately should come at the beginning:

> In many ways, over the last ten years, Britain has led the world in the advance of tuberculosis.
>
> R Over the last ten years Britain has in many ways led (The jerkiness due to the commas is avoided.)

(Note. *Advance of* should be *advance against*.)

> By telephone at 10.15 a.m. on Friday June 28, 1957 the medical officer of health was informed by the consultant physician of X hospital of a case of suspected smallpox in that hospital.
>
> R At 10.15 a.m. on Friday June 28, 1957 the consultant physician for infectious diseases at X hospital informed the M.O.H. by telephone of a case of smallpox.

In the amended form, *by telephone* being unimportant, is relegated to a subsidiary position. *In that hospital* is unnecessary because the physician would not have notified a case occurring elsewhere. Note how the active voice improves the sentence (p 97)

When the emphasis is on the time, and especially on duration, the temporal clause should come last as in

> The prestige of surgical treatment for bronchiectasis reached its zenith in the period immediately after the last war.
>
> I have done this operation regularly for the last seven years.
>
> Frontal leucotomy has been used for intractable pain for over a decade.

4 Remote from the verb

We find the basal metabolic rate still of the greatest value.
R: We still find

The conjunction of adverbs may have an inelegant effect

During an epidemic such as last autumn's usually severe cases are seldom referred to a laboratory unless

Usually and *seldom* seem to be a contradiction in terms.

R such as occurred last autumn, severe cases are seldom

ONLY, MERELY, EVEN, ALSO

Fowler mercilessly flays the 'precisionists" and 'pedants who insist that *only* must always be placed immediately before the word or phrase it limits, who object to such phrases as 'he only died last week.' I agree. Although it should usually be placed before the word or phrase it limits, this rule should not be strictly adhered to in all contexts One should have regard to rhythm. Hazlitt wrote She [Lady Macbeth] is only wicked to gain a great end A modern purist would write is wicked only Hazlitt's phrasing has the smoother flow But in the following the amended form is perhaps the better

It is only to be found on close examination.
R to be found only on

In others it has only become apparent when the carcass is cut up.
R it has become apparent only when

Union can only take place between the cut upper end of the stump and the severed aspect of the colon.
R Union can take place only between

The position of *only* may affect the meaning For example, "Life can *only* be *prolonged* by gastrectomy This means either that life can be prolonged by gastrectomy but by no *other means* or that life can be *prolonged* but not saved by gastrectomy If the former is meant, R "only by gastrectomy can life be prolonged", if the latter R Gastrectomy can only prolong life' or can do no more than prolong life.

Only (and *alone*) can immediately follow the word it governs 'Him *only* shalt thou serve. He alone deserves a prize.

Merely and *even* are similar to *only*

Its physiological basis is supposed merely to consist of these mechanisms.

This says that knowledge of the facts is gained under tropical conditions.

> R. It is known that under tropical conditions of heat the ready-made

> W and C. are cautious in recommending the use of salicylates as respiratory stimulants in spite of showing their effectiveness.
> R Although W and C. show the effectiveness of salicylates as respiratory stimulants they are cautious in recommending them.

> Rest is a traditional principle in the treatment of active disease.
> R: In the treatment of active disease rest is a traditional principle.

> Two most important points about the giving of sedative drugs must be emphasized before discussing any of them in detail.
> R: Before discussing in detail the use of sedative drugs two most important points must be emphasized. (*Any of* is unnecessary; avoid the gerund *giving*.)

> There are surprisingly few experiments dealing with the production of skin cancer in animals upon application of tobacco smoke condensate in view of the attention given to the problem.
> R. In view of the attention given to the problem, experiments on the production of skin cancer in animals by the application of tobacco smoke condensate are surprisingly few

EXPLANATORY CLAUSES

An explanatory clause, if short, should be placed at the beginning if long it should form a separate sentence.

> Of these 127 38 did not initially accept the services of the advice clinic for various reasons, among which geographical reasons predominated.
> R For various reasons, mainly geographical, 38 of the 127 did not at first accept the services of the advisory clinic.

> A number of possibilities exist to account for the figures cited.
> R To account for the figures cited a number

The incorrect position of a subordinate clause may result in a meaning that was not intended

> Tricyclamol has been shown to be effective in decreasing gastric motility in balloon motility studies and also in barium studies.

The writer implies that tricyclamol is effective in the conditions of the studies he means that from the studies it can be inferred that it is effective in all conditions.

> R. Studies with barium and with balloons show that tricyclamol decreases gastric motility (*Be effective in* is redundant.)

Compare the above with

> Knowledge of pulmonary pathology has been greatly extended in recent years.

Recent years being vague, the sentence ends weakly. The emphasis is on *greatly extended*. Therefore

> R. In recent years knowledge ... extended.

PLACE

If the place needs emphasis the clause expressing place should come at the end. 'X disease is very prevalent in Singapore, Java and Borneo.' But when emphasis is not needed the place should come first.

> We have had some experience at O. in carrying out tests on mice.
> R. At O. we have had ...

> The public concept of mental disorders is somewhat primitive in India.

The whole article being about India, the place needs no emphasis. The emphasis should be on *somewhat primitive*.

> R. In India the public concept of mental disorders is somewhat primitive.

When a clause of place and a clause of time occur in a sentence they should be separated.

> In the U.S.A. at the present time much concern is expressed about the difficulty of recruiting scientists.
> R. In the U.S.A. the difficulty of recruiting scientists is now causing much concern.

QUALIFYING OR LIMITING PHRASES

These should usually come before the main phrase. The reader should not have to wait until the end for them.

> Reticulocyte counts were performed on all patients treated with folic acid.
> R.: On all patients treated with folic acid reticulocyte counts were performed.

A limiting clause should be placed next to the part of the sentence it limits.

> Under tropical conditions of heat it is known that the ready-made solution of suxamethonium chloride undergoes decomposition.

In view of the relatively progressive history and because of the age of the patient, however we arranged his admission to hospital

R. In view however of the

Moreover should be placed either at the beginning or after the verb. "Moreover I have found that " and "I have found, moreover that " are correct. "I moreover have found that " and "I have moreover found that " are incorrect.

Furthermore yet, nevertheless should come at the beginning

Therefore may be placed after the subject or preferably after the verb (or the auxiliary of the verb)

The available evidence therefore would seem to indicate
The available evidence would therefore seem to indicate

The second is preferable. But in argument or logic, *therefore* should come at the beginning

THE PREPOSITIONAL ENDING

The objection to ending a sentence with a preposition was first raised by Dryden who was probably influenced by French usage. *Though Dryden's view persists it is not generally followed. In* English words of Anglo-Saxon origin, prepositions usually follow verbs they are rarely prefixed to verbs as they are in German. "It has come out," not "It has outcome." (Cf. German, *Es ist ausgekommen*) By a natural extension prepositions may be separated from the verbs by several words. By using what has become a natural idiom we avoid introducing the clumsy *who* or *which* clause. "This is more than the amount we applied to the Ministry of Health for" reads more easily than "This is more than the amount for which we applied to the Ministry of Health." We cannot say "She had three children after whom to look." In short, the prepositional ending is unavoidable and unobjectionable.

THE SPLIT INFINITIVE

The discovery of a split infinitive makes, or at least used to make, schoolgirls whoop with joy Yet never was a taboo imposed with so little reason. To show how arbitrary the taboo

Note the possible misinterpretation in

> The voting went in favour of boxing being abolished by a small majority

The small majority did not abolish boxing

> R By a small majority the voting went abolished.

ADJECTIVES

When an adjective is qualified by an adverb both the adjective and the adverb should be placed after the substantive The antibiotics recently discovered instead of "The recently discovered antibiotics.'

An adjective or a participle used as an adjective should be placed immediately before the clause it governs

> This might be due to other factors than
> R This might be due to factors other than

> Any group of disabled patients with mitral stenosis
> R Any group of patients disabled with

> Fifty years ago the anaesthetist was presented with similar problems to those which beset us in 1959.
> R with problems similar to those

CONJUNCTIONS

The position of some conjunctions affects the meaning of the sentence. Consider the following

1 However, I have found that
2 I, however, have found that
3 I have, however, found that
4 I have found, however, that

1 Dismisses the previous statement, or means Be that as it may

2 Means I as opposed to someone else, have found that '

3 Is incorrect.

4 Means as opposed to what I expected

If *however* is put far down in the sentence it loses its effect and should be omitted, or the construction changed

> That it is an extremely dangerous condition however is evident.
> Omit *however*

IX

Construction

Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.

Alice in Wonderland

INDIRECT EXPRESSION

Of all the faults found in medical writing the commonest is indirect expression. It permeates clinical descriptions to their great detriment. It usually consists in the use of the adverb, *there* with a part of the verb *to be*—*there is*, *there are* *there was* *there were* On account of its frequency I give several examples

There are other factors adversely affecting the absorption of fat.
R Other factors adversely affect

There was neither pain nor swelling of his ankles, feet or wrists.
R His ankles, feet and wrists were neither painful nor swollen.

In the first stage there is an increase in the heart rate.
R In the first stage the heart rate is increased. Or the pulse is quickened.

There was abdominal distension.
R The abdomen was distended.

There was dramatic narrowing of the branches of the pulmonary artery
R The branches of the pulmonary artery were much narrowed. (How can there be any drama in a post-mortem specimen?)

There was blindness of the left eye.
R The left eye was blind.

There still exists controversy over
R Controversy still exists over

An objection to indirect expression is that it may lead to the introduction of an unnecessary subordinate clause.

There are only two patients who approach this type.
R Only two patients approach this type.

There were 85 men with a raised cholesterol level, of whom 34 had clinical vascular disease.
R Of the 85 men with raised cholesterol level 34 had clinical vascular disease.

is it should be explained that a split infinitive is the interpolation of an adverb between *to* and the infinitive or between *to* and the auxiliary Interpolation between the auxiliary and the participle is not a split infinitive *To absolutely condemn* and *to absolutely have condemned* are split infinitives, but *to have absolutely condemned* is not. The proper position of an adverb depends upon its strength If emphasis is required, the adverb should follow the completed verb *To fully endorse* is correct because *fully* does not materially add to the force of *endorse* If one endorses, one usually endorses fully *To fully describe* is incorrect because *fully* deserves more emphasis, a description may or may not be full. *To graciously accept* is as correct as *graciously to accept* because the expression is a formality To invite a distinguished person to accept graciously would be an impertinence, it would suggest to him how he should accept.

> Whereas the cult of the dealer is as old as mankind, the ability to actively promote health, to influence substantially the course of disease, and to save lives is in the main an affair of the twentieth century

Here the split infinitive is not in itself wrong What is wrong is that it is followed by a phrase in which it has been avoided. To be properly balanced the sentence should have read " the ability to promote health actively to influence the course of disease substantially

Pedantic obedience to the taboo may lead to ambiguity In *to re-examine carefully compiled statistics* to what does *carefully* refer? To the re-examination or to the compilation? If it refers to the re-examination *to carefully re-examine* is correct.

There is therefore no objection to the split infinitive if it best conveys the meaning and gives the smoothest flow The split should however be confined to one word. *To daily and indefatigably pursue* is incorrect.

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>
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> R. The left eye was blind.
>
> There still exists controversy over
> R. Controversy still exists over

An objection to indirect expression is that it may lead to the introduction of an unnecessary subordinate clause.

> There are only two patients who approach this type.
> R. Only two patients approach this type.
>
> There were 83 men with a raised cholesterol level, of whom 34 had clinical vascular disease.
> R. Of the 83 men with raised cholesterol level 34 had clinical vascular disease.

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There are other factors adversely affecting the absorption of fat.
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There was neither pain nor swelling of his ankles, feet or wrists.
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An objection to indirect expression is that it may lead to the introduction of an unnecessary subordinate clause.

There are only two patients who approach this type.
R. Only two patients approach this type.

There were 85 men with a raised cholesterol level, of whom 34 had clinical vascular disease.
R: Of the 85 men with raised cholesterol level 34 had clinical vascular disease.

Allied to indirect expression is the fault of placing the emphasis on the substantive accompanied by a weak verb instead of on the verb or predicate (I use the term 'weak verb' in the semantic, not in the grammarian's sense). This defies the rule that the verb or predicate, being the most important word, should carry as much of the meaning of the sentence as possible.

> She had some residual weakness of her left hand (*had* is here a weak verb)
> R Her left hand was still slightly weak.
>
> The suggestion has been made that (*has been made* is a weak verb)
> R It has been suggested that
>
> It is my view that (*is* is a weak verb)
> R I believe that
>
> The total of fractures studied was over 8,500 (*was* is a weak verb)
> R: Over 8,500 fractures were studied.
>
> This resulted in complete relief of pain (*resulted* is a weak verb)
> R Pain was completely relieved.
>
> The demonstration that is by no means an explanation of the facts.
> R by no means explains the facts.
>
> An initial reduction of sputum positivity occurred (*occurred* is a weak verb)
> R: Sputum positivity was at first reduced. (Or better) At first, sputum-positive findings were reduced.
>
> The lymphatic drainage to the prostate is to the glands lying in the hollow of the sacrum.
> R The lymphatics of the prostate drain to
>
> He then suffered a recurrence of his headache with return of his dysphagia and right hemiparesis.
> R: Headache, dysphagia and right hemiparesis then recurred.

In the last example *suffered* is unnecessary because the patient obviously suffered. *His* is unnecessary because no other patient is concerned.

> At the beginning of our investigations we decided that there were quite inadequate data concerning the response to exercise in normal subjects studied under the same conditions as patients with heart disease.
> R investigations we found that data concerning the response to exercise of normal subjects studied under conditions similar to those of patients with heart disease were quite inadequate.

Note that the inadequacy of the data was a matter of discovery not decision.

A still worse fault is to construct a clumsy substantive from a verb instead of using the verb itself

> We were able to show that the repeatability of measurement of the cardiac output was highly satisfactory
>
> R: We were able to show that we could repeat the measurement of the cardiac output very satisfactorily

Note the correction to the active voice (see Voice below)

The two faults—the use of indirect expression and the placing of the emphasis on the substantive instead of on the predicate are frequently combined. Read this sentence aloud

> There is no justification for so wide a difference in the figures.

It sounds flat because the emphasis is placed on the substantive *justification* which requires the weak word *there* as well as the equally weak verb *is*. The writer is making a criticism but it is only half-hearted. Now change the sentence to

> So wide a difference in the figures is not justified.

There being omitted, and the emphasis being placed on the predicate *is not justified*, the criticism is given its full force.

> Thus it appears that there still exists controversy over the relative potency of triamcoline.
>
> R: Apparently therefore the potency of triamcoline is still disputed.

Note the omission of *relative* (p. 40)

In the following, the plural verb, though not grammatically incorrect makes the sentence clumsy

> There have been a sharp fall in the infantile death rate and a corresponding rise in the expectation of life.
>
> R: The infantile death rate has fallen and the expectation of life has correspondingly increased.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

Active voice means that the subject performs the action passive voice means that the subject suffers the action. Active "The patient disobeyed the sister" Passive "The sister was disobeyed by the patient." For many writers the passive has a fatal attraction with the result that the force of their remarks is blunted

> On the basis of this evidence it has been assumed by some
>
> R: On the basis of this evidence some have assumed.

This has been achieved by us by measuring blood-pressure under the same circumstances.
R We have achieved this

It has recently been shown by us
R We have recently shown

It seemed probable to us
R We thought it probable

That intractable heart failure is capable of routine therapy has been shown by M. *et al.* and G *et al*
R M. *et al* and G *et al.* have shown that

In some constructions the passive cannot be avoided For instance, there is no better way of saying "The association between A. and B has been known for many years. Here the active expression We have known or Everybody has known' would not meet the case.

THE SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

The purpose of the subordinate clause which is usually introduced by a relative pronoun or a preposition, is to modify or clarify the main statement in such a way that it does not obtrude upon or detract from the main statement. You should therefore study the relative value of the clauses of which your sentences are composed. You should not join clauses of unequal value by *and*, but should relegate the minor statement to a subordinate clause You will thus make the sentence compact and will direct the reader's attention to the main fact you wish to convey

Her doctor found her pulse to be rapid and irregular and considered that she had auricular fibrillation.

The main fact is the doctor's opinion how he arrived at it is of minor importance

R Her doctor finding a rapid and irregular pulse, thought she had auricular fibrillation.

A worse fault, to which medical writers are unfortunately much addicted, is to reverse the relative value of the clauses by making the minor statement the principal clause and relegating the major statement to a subordinate clause. It further entails the inclusion of a redundant verb in the subordinate clause This is particularly liable to happen when the passive voice is used

A survey was made among both urban and country Bantu by O., who found that

The main fact concerns what O found the survey was merely the method he used.

R: O., in a survey of both town and country Bantu, found

The prevalence in a general hospital population has been investigated by G., who noted that, of 55 patients admitted in one year suffering from jaundice, chlorpromazine was the cause in five cases.

The main fact is what G noted where he noted it is incidental.

R: G., investigating the prevalence in a general hospital, noted that out of 55 cases admitted with jaundice in one year five were due to chlorpromazine.

Or better

G. noted that out of 55 cases admitted with jaundice to a general hospital within a year five were due to chlorpromazine.

Position of the Subordinate Clause

A clause that is subordinate to two or more principal clauses should not be placed between them.

Attacks of abdominal pain have been the principal feature in all cases in this group, and have also been the initial symptoms of the disease.

In all cases in this group is subordinate to *have been the principal feature* and also to *have also been the initial* *In this group* is unnecessary because the whole paragraph is about a specific group *of the disease* is unnecessary because the whole article is about the disease.

R In all the patients attacks of abdominal pain were the principal feature and the initial symptom.

He noted that hypothermia was present in all three cases, the blood sugar was normal, and there was an absence of shivering.

In all three cases refers to the three conditions.

R He noted that in all three cases the blood sugar was normal, hypothermia was present and shivering absent.

Inner Subordinate Clauses

A subordinate clause should not be placed inside another

Those in the best position to detect cerebral palsy early are child-welfare workers and the family doctors who take a special interest in babies, who are most likely to detect slight differences from the normal.

The writer says the same thing twice over (p 46) He says those who detect cerebral palsy early are those who detect slight differences from the normal

> R Those in the best position to detect slight departures from the normal suggesting cerebral palsy are child-welfare workers and family doctors who take a special interest in babies.

PARALLEL CLAUSES

Parallel clauses are those joined by *and*, *or*, *either* *or*, *neither* *nor* *not only* *but also* etc. Care must be taken to follow the mathematical principle of the highest common factor, i e. all words that govern or are common to the two clauses must be placed outside both of them so that they apply grammatically to each of the clauses separately

Such sentences may be represented by the formula X (A + B) where X represents all the words that are in common, and A and B the two clauses Failure to observe this rule takes two forms redundancy X (A + XB), and omission (XA + B)

REDUNDANCY, X (A + XB)

> Surveys sometimes lead to constructive suggestions, but sometimes merely to further surveys.

Surveys sometimes lead (X) is common to *constructive suggestions* (A) and *merely to further surveys* (B)

> R Surveys sometimes lead to constructive suggestions or merely to

> Not only have these patients increasingly impaired cardiac action, but they also have an increased load
> R These patients have not only increasingly impaired heart action but also an increased load.

> Gas in the tissues following perforation of the bowel may be due to either a direct escape of gas from the perforated bowel or to infection with gas-producing organisms.
> R may be due either to

> Operation was not undertaken as an emergency but usually within forty-eight hours of admission.
> R Operation was undertaken not as an

> The trial was set up to study out-patient treatment of individuals with either rheumatoid arthritis involving the hands or knees, or with degenerative joint disease involving the knees.
> R: individuals with either rheumatoid arthritis affecting the hands or knees, or degenerative joint disease affecting the knees. (Note the wrong use of *involving*)

Clinical manifestations of the untreated disease either showed a high incidence of spontaneous remission or they persisted unchanged.

Omit *they*.

OMISSION, (XA + B)

Sometimes the end of the common clause, usually a preposition, needs to be repeated. Otherwise the second clause, B is left in the air unconnected with X.

There is still some doubt about the upper normal limit but not the lower limit.

R: but not about the lower limit.

It would not only be wrong but impossible to persuade people

R. It would be not only wrong but also impossible

It is not written by a medical man, but a Ph.D

Whichever the author may be, it is to be hoped that he writes better than his reviewer

R: It is written not by a medical man but by a Ph.D.

Or better: The writer is not a medical man; he is a Ph.D

[John Hunter] was uncouth in his ways and fond neither of general company nor polite converse.

R neither of general company nor of polite converse.

CHANGE OF CONSTRUCTION

Do not change the construction in the middle of a sentence. Examples

FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE VOICE

When our paper was abstracted by R. he rightly criticized us

R. When R. abstracted our paper

The observation by L. that infants with obstructive jaundice have large livers was confirmed and we found that the degree of

R. We confirmed L.'s observation and found

Though slightly varying estimates were given of the frequency with which the phenomenon occurred, all authors agreed that the condition

R: All these authors, though differing slightly in their estimates of the frequency of the phenomenon, agreed that

Changes in enzymic activity with age have been reported by a number of investigators, and F has related the enzymic changes to the morphological changes occurring during maturation.

In addition to changing the voice the writer has unnecessarily altered *changes in enzymic activity* to *enzymic changes*.

R A number of investigators have reported the changes in enzymic activity with age, and F has related them (or these changes) to the morphological

FROM NOUN TO GERUND

These factors are not of major importance in causation or in preventing chronicity

R in the cause or in the prevention

FROM GERUND TO INFINITIVE

It is not the occasion for discrediting their skill, but rather to commend their steadfast adherence.

R It is the occasion not for discrediting their skill, but rather for commending

FROM INFINITIVE TO GERUND

I propose to approach this medical commentary from the viewpoint of a practising physician rather than attempting an academic integration of the subject.

R I propose to approach rather than attempt.

FROM INDIRECT TO DIRECT EXPRESSION

In spite of this there was no improvement in the severe pain of the osteo-arthropathy the dyspnoea was not alleviated, and the patient remained completely bed-ridden.

R In spite of this the dyspnoea and the severe pain in the joints were not relieved the patient remained bed ridden. (A patient cannot be partly bed-ridden.) (p. 28)

For change to tense and mood see pp 68 70

FURTHER EXAMPLES OF FAULTY CONSTRUCTION

The length of the lesser curvature between the oesophagus and the pylorus gets steadily less and there is relative elongation of the greater curvature.

Everyone knows that the lesser curvature is the part between the oesophagus and the pylorus *Gets* is bad English. *Steadily* and *relative* are redundant.

R The lesser curvature becomes shorter and the greater curvature longer (10 words instead of 24.)

No general agreement exists on whether the adrenal glands in the male are heavier than in the female.

R Whether the adrenal glands are heavier in the male than in the female is in doubt.

However admirable this may be on humanitarian and personal grounds, it has led to mankind living longer than nature intended or has legislated for

Nature does not legislate

R. It has led to man's living longer than he has legislated for and longer than nature intended.

Some of the underlying pathological causes include pulmonary and cardiac conditions, ulcerative colitis, steatorrhoea, etc.

Note *Pathological* is unnecessary.

R: Some of the underlying causes are (Or) Among the underlying causes are

The time allotted has to be presented firmly and kindly just as a dose of sleeping pills with its limited ration.

What is being presented is not time but presumably advice. To indicate the limit of time the writer compares it to a ration. But the comparison is invalid since there is no question of presenting the dose firmly and kindly.

R. In the limited time allotted, advice has to be presented firmly and kindly.

For the polypharmacy of yore, with its emphasis on mixtures and nostra, has been substituted by a battery of active remedies—antibiotics.

R: has been substituted a battery of
(Or), has been replaced by a battery of

Note The plural of *nostrum* is *nostrums*.

We are not satisfied with the maintenance of the disabled person, only with his rehabilitation as far as practicable to a full and normal life.

Only is used in the wrong sense.

R. The mere maintenance of the disabled person is insufficient; nothing short of his rehabilitation as far as possible to a full and normal life satisfies us.

The phrase has been coined of a "break-through."

R The phrase "break-through" has been coined.

The trial was made in two stages, each conducted on 4 patients, being in each of the four separate hospitals.

R The trial, in two stages, was made on four patients who were in different hospitals. (See p. 112.)
(Hospitals are usually separate.)

The preponderance of female diabetics could be explained partly on the grounds of parity although parity does not lead to the earlier appearance of diabetes.

Among the faults in this clumsy sentence are the repetition of *partly* and the incorrect position of the qualifying clause. (p. 90.)

R Although parity does not cause diabetes to appear earlier it may partly explain its greater incidence in women.

In rats fed on a diet of maize porridge I was unable to demonstrate increased iron deposition as compared to a control group on a stock diet.

R I was unable to show that more iron was deposited in rats fed on maize porridge than in those on a stock diet.

It is now nearly ten years since radioactive iodine was first used [for thyrotoxicosis] in this country and it has been in use in the U.S.A. for nearly twice as long Nevertheless, the results of treatment are still far from satisfactory and are unpredictable in the individual case.

R Although thyrotoxicosis has been treated by radioactive iodine for nearly ten years in this country and nearly twenty in the U.S.A. the results are still unsatisfactory and unpredictable. (See *individual*, p. 57)

It is known that amyloid is a somewhat inert substance, and both deposition and absorption of the material occur slowly

R Amyloid is known to be somewhat inert and only slowly deposited and absorbed.

It is also somewhat intriguing to recall that these glandular remnants in the female have been reported by many observers over the years without their significance receiving due attention.

R It is also somewhat intriguing (? interesting) to recall that although over the years many observers have described these glandular remnants in the female their significance has not been realized. (See Gerund, p. 74.)

The growth of the brain proceeds ahead of most of the other organs of the body

The writer has omitted *that of* before *most* This however would bring in a fifth *of* The fault arises through using the weak verb *proceeds* instead of the strong verb *grows* (I use weak and strong in the sense of meaning not of grammar)

R The brain grows more rapidly (or earlier) than most organs.

Not only were the evils of quackery manifest, but also the inadequacy of training of many of the qualified.

The second part of the sentence has no verb unless *was manifest* is understood

R The evils of quackery were manifest the training of the qualified " was inadequate.

From a doctor's letter in *The Times*

It is true that production of marriage certificates is not so often required as for birth certificates.

R It is true that marriage certificates do not have to be produced as often as birth certificates.

The following passage contains a great many faults

> The surface cells of the small intestine which cover the intestinal villi are of two types. Firstly there are simple columnar cells which are non-secretory and primarily absorptive in function. Between these simple columnar cells may be seen goblet cells, in varying stages of mucus secretion.

1 The whole article is about the small intestine and is headed "Histopathology of the Small Intestine." Since villi are present only in the small intestine it is unnecessary to state their location.

2 *Surface* and *cover* are tautological.

3. *Firstly* is out of place because it is not followed by *secondly thirdly*

4. *There are in function* and *may be seen* are unnecessary

5. *Primarily absorptive.* The function of the cells must be absorption or secretion or both. Since the cells are stated to be non-secreting they must absorb. There is no question of a primary function.

6 *Simple columnar cells* is repeated unnecessarily

7 *Between* should be *among*

8. There should be no comma after *goblet cells*

> R. The surface cells of the villi are of two types: simple columnar cells which absorb but do not secrete, and among these, goblet cells seen in varying stages of mucus secretion. (31 words instead of 46.)

> There seems to be a relatively large proportion of deaths "face down" during the first month, when it is extremely unlikely for a child to be able to turn itself on to its face unless it was virtually placed there originally

To what does the last *it* refer the child or the face? Where was it placed? Relatively to what? *Itself* is redundant because the child could not turn anything else. *Virtually* is meaningless. Note also that if the child had been placed "face down" it would have had no need to turn itself on to its face. The last seven words are therefore redundant.

> R. ... during the first month, a period when it is extremely unlikely that a child can turn on to its face.

> Chlorpropamide was administered to 126 diabetics. Approximately 50% of this number had either relapsed or failed to respond to tolbutamide.

> R: Chlorpropamide was given to 128 diabetics of whom about half had either

Pulmonary heart-disease is as often the cause of cardiac failure as hypertensive heart-disease, and two-thirds as common as atherosclerotic or valvular heart-disease in causing cardiac decompensation.

This is less clear than it need have been because the writer has changed the construction from *as the cause* to *causing* and *as often* to *as common*

R As a cause of cardiac failure pulmonary heart-disease is as common as hypertensive heart-disease, and as a cause of cardiac decompensation two-thirds as common as atherosclerotic or valvular heart-disease.

THE FORMER THE LATTER

These words often irritate the reader by compelling him to look back to find the antecedents, i e the words to which they refer—sometimes a difficult task. Allbutt thought them detestable and preferred *this* and *that* He gave an example

The patient suffered from nephritis and heart disease that the physician observed, this he overlooked."

Most readers would consider this construction stilted and obscure. Unless the antecedents are simple words that have just been mentioned it is better to repeat them although the effect may seem monotonous

If *the former the latter* are used, care must be taken that there are not more than two antecedents Even Coleridge errs

Take away Benedict, Beatrice, Dogberry and the reaction of the former on the character of Hero,—and what will remain?

Whose reaction?

The nutrients, as ordinarily referred to include carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, and inorganic elements. Certain of the latter are present in foodstuffs as trace elements—e.g iodine.

The latter presumably refers to *inorganic elements* If so

R Certain of the last named (or) Some of the inorganic elements

We are fortunate in being able to compare the incidence and nature of diabetes among the three racial groups in Natal Bantu, Indian and European. Among the latter diabetes resembles that of white races elsewhere.

R Among Europeans (or Among the last named) diabetes is

A fault of a different kind coupled with other faults, is own in

> The most satisfactory treatment of current styes involves simultaneous application of non-systemic antibiotics to both eyelids and to the anterior nares. This latter should be done four times a day for ten days.

Eyelids and *nares* being plural, to what does *this latter* refer? Presumably to the treatment of both nares.

> R antibiotics to the eyelids and anterior nares. The nares should be treated

Why are no directions given for the eyelids? (Here is that horrible word *involves* again.) R *consists in the*

FIRST(LY) SECONDLY THIRDLY

According to Fowler "the preference for *first* over *firstly* in formal enumeration is one of the harmless pedantries in which those who like oddities are free to indulge, provided that they abstain from censuring those who do not share the liking" Writing in 1926 he said "A century hence the idiom-books will probably not even mention *first, secondly*" Although more than 30 years have gone by *first, secondly* are still going strong in leading articles in *The Times* and other reputable journals. Logically *first, secondly* cannot be justified we should write either *first, second* or *firstly secondly* For myself I have always written *first, secondly* and logic cannot cure me of the habit. A way of shirking the difficulty is to write *In the first place*

A caution is necessary If a writer starts off with first(ly) he must not forget he has *done so* and neglect to write *secondly thirdly* otherwise the reader loses the sequence. For an example see p. 105. Conversely if he writes *secondly thirdly* he must make sure that he has written *first(ly)* otherwise the reader does not know where the series begins.

HOWEVER, MOREOVER

The great writers, from Gibbon to Sir Winston Churchill, use these words very sparingly Gibbon hardly ever They succeed in piling up the argument without them. How they do it I leave my readers to discover for themselves. I have of course no objection to these words in fact I use them in this

book. My complaint is that in medical writing their use has become stereotyped There are many synonyms on which the changes can be rung For *however* we have *nevertheless notwithstanding all the same, yet,* and that good little word *but* which writers for some reason fight shy of using For *moreover* we have *in addition, further* and *furthermore* We also have *and* which, despite a commonly held belief to the contrary, can sometimes be used with great effect at the beginning of a sentence.

X

Clinical Descriptions

> A sharp nose, hollow eyes, collapsed temples ... the hands waved before the face, hunting through empty space as if gathering bits of straw, picking nap from the coverlet or tearing chaff from the wall—all such symptoms are bad and deadly
>
> *Hippocrates* (Adams's translation)

> For after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen and a'babbled of green fields.
>
> *Henry V Act II, Scene 3.*

THE HIPPOCRATIC STYLE

Clinical descriptions are particularly liable to verbosity and circumlocution they should be written in such a way as to bring out the relevant facts vividly and in as few words as possible, omitting all negative findings except those that are significant. A frequent fault is indirect expression. I have discussed this in an earlier chapter I give one further example

> There was no detectable hepatic enlargement. There was no splenic enlargement.
>
> R. The liver and spleen could not be felt.

Should clinical descriptions be written fully or telegraphically? For accounts of behaviour feelings past history complicated examinations, and treatment full sentences are essential, but for standard methods of examination that are expressed in stereotyped abbreviations the telegraphic method is, in my opinion, preferable. In the following the writer has already described the patient's occupation, symptoms and his admission to hospital. He continues

> Physical examination revealed a well-built man (205 lb.—93 kg.) who was febrile (100° F—37·8° C) and obviously ill. There was no clinical cardiac enlargement, but examination of the heart showed evidence of a severe degree of aortic incompetence. The pulse frequency was 90 a minute and the pulse wave collapsing. The blood-pressure was 130/50.

Here, among other redundancies are *man*, *frequency degree* and *a minute*

R On examination he was well-built (203 lb.—93 kg.) febrile 100 F.—37·8 C.) and obviously ill. Heart, severe aortic incompetence but no enlargement pulse 90, collapsing blood-pressure 150/50

Excluding those in brackets the words have been reduced from 49 to 21 without any loss of information

Other examples are

The pulse was of poor volume but regular at 120 beats per minute.

R: Pulse regular 120 volume poor

Laparotomy was carried out through a lower right paramedian incision. There was no free fluid in the peritoneal cavity

Laparotomy cannot be carried out without an incision. In fact it is an incision. And where on earth was free fluid expected except in the peritoneum?

R Lower right paramedian laparotomy was performed. There was no free fluid.

Pathological Report. Microscopical examination of the tissue was performed by Dr X. who reported

R Microscopical examination (Dr X.)

Full phrases and telegraphic phrases should not be used in the same sentence

At this time her pulse was 132 a minute, sleeping pulse 90/min.
R pulse (awake) 132 (sleeping) 90.

In describing blood pressure *Hg* is unnecessary

The finest models of brevity and vividness are Hippocrates's descriptions of his patients It is believed that these were transcribed from a kind of shorthand and were intended not for publication but for private use They mostly follow the same plan. The first few sentences are written fully but the remainder telegraphically except when a general comment is being made. Here is Case X from the *Third Book on Epidemics* As was to be expected from so distinguished a scholar the translation is accurate and literal *

In Abdera Nicodemus after venery and drunkenness was seized with fever At the beginning he had nausea and cardalgia thirst tongue parched urine thick and black.

Second day The fever increased shivering nausea no

* *Hippocrates* Translated by W H. S Jones. Vol. I 1923. Loeb Classical Library: Heinemann.

sleep bilious, yellow vomits urine the same a quiet night sleep.

Third day All symptoms less severe: relief. But about sunset he was again somewhat uncomfortable painful night.

Fourth day Rigor much fever; pains everywhere urine thin, with floating substances in it; the night, on the other hand, was quiet.

Fifth day All symptoms present, but relieved.

Sixth day Some pains everywhere; substances floating in urine much delirium.

Seventh day Relief.

Eighth day All the other symptoms less severe.

Tenth and following days. The pains were present, but all less severe. The exacerbations and the pains in the case of this patient tended throughout to occur on the even days.

Twentieth day Urine white having consistency no sediment on standing. Copious sweating seemed to lose his fever but towards evening grew hot again, with pain in the same parts shivering thirst slight delirium.

Twenty-fourth day Much white urine, with much sediment; hot sweating all over the fever passed away in a crisis.

The following is an admirable clinical description written in the Hippocratic style

Hypophosphatasia with Congenital Dimples

S. D. V Weller M.D., M.R.C.P

S.B. male, born 9 6.58.

Dimples noted at birth over lower third of forearms and legs there were remarkably symmetrical and varied from a shallow depression on forearms to deep pits over fibulae, corresponding to exostoses. No bowing of long bones (Fig. 1)

Attended outpatients 8.9.58. No symptoms. Dimples unchanged. Sutures very wide. No other signs. Breast fed.

Investigations.—X-rays Skull dense base vault poorly ossified with wide sutures. Long bones osteoporosis and irregularity at metaphyses, especially of humeri and tibiae (Fig. 2).

Blood picture normal. Calcium 11·7 phosphorus 4·1 cholesterol 185, sodium 340, potassium 21 urea 23 mg. %. Alkaline phosphatase 2 K.-A. units. W.R. negative.

Urine Marked excess of phospho-ethanolamine.

Family history.—Elder brother healthy: alkaline phosphatase 10 K.-A. units: urine shows a little phospho-ethanolamine. Father well; urine normal but alkaline phosphatase 3 K. A. units. Mother well alkaline phosphatase 4 K.-A. units and urine shows a little phospho-ethanolamine.

Treatment.—Triamcinolone with penicillin cover from 31 10.58 to 29 12.58. Breast feeding maintained.

Progress.—No alteration in general appearance or condition.

1 11 58: Alkaline phosphatase 6 K.-A. units.

25-11 58: Bones markedly improved—almost normal (Fig. 3). Sutures closing and fontanelle rather tense.

10.12 58 Calcium 10·6, phosphorus 5·9 mg. %, alkaline phosphatase 6 K. A. units. Urinary excretion of phosphoethanolamine unaltered.

7 1 59 Bony improvement maintained.

20.1 59 Calcium 10·4, phosphorus 6·9 mg % alkaline phosphatase 6 K. A. units.

THE EXPRESSION OF NUMBERS

In non technical English the rule is to write small numbers in words and large numbers in figures, e.g seven, 953 In scientific works concerned with many small numbers on which the argument hangs it is essential to write these in figures. But when small numbers occur in isolation or are few they should be written in words When written in figures they offend the eye

> They all use 2 sticks for walking
>
> We know of only 1 other pregnant patient treated by hypothermia following an intracranial lesion.

In the following the figure causes ambiguity

> All patients except 1 showed a significant fall.

The reader wonders whether No *1* is meant and hunts for a No 1

Figures look especially wrong when they occur at the beginning of a sentence.

> 1 patient aged fifty-six
> R One patient, aged 56

Figures and words should not be used in the same sentence.

> This was probably 1 operation for every two or three patients.

Age should be stated in figures e.g a child of 7 a man of 43 but not as in the following

> These children have been subject to the manifold social changes of the time, not least of which was the inception of the N H.S when they were 2
> R when they were 2 years old.

In hyphenated words such as *two-year-olds* words should be used

Ordinal numbers roughly obey the same rules For numbers that have a special significance and for round numbers e.g *seventieth birthday* words should be used Otherwise they

should be written in figures, e.g 1818. For small numbers figures are entirely out of place.

> The 1st case treated (case 1) suddenly died.
> R: The first patient treated (No. 1)
>
> In a 5th case (case 4) who died
> R: In a fifth patient (No. 4)

The *following sentence* contains a cardinal number in words, an ordinal number in figures and a cardinal number in figures—a lamentable lack of uniformity

> *Of these three cases, the 1st was not given heparin, and in the next 2 cases the dose was*
> R: Of these three patients the first was   in the next two patients

Both with cardinal and ordinal numbers, when two or more are mentioned the substantive should be placed after the last

> Their ages ranged from 18 years to 80.
> R   from 18 to 80 years.

(*Years* could have been omitted since no other unit could have been meant.) The context *excludes children.*

XI

Technical Terms and Neologisms

Well, slithy means lithe and slimy Lithe is the same as active [said Humpty Dumpty] "You see, it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into a word."

Through the Looking-Glass.

THE NECESSITY FOR TECHNICAL TERMS

It is impossible within the scope of this book to enter fully into the technical terms used in medicine. I have dealt with them systematically in my *Medical Terms Their Origin and Construction.* Still less is it possible to deal comprehensively with new words Since these are being added to the vocabulary at the rate of about 1 000 a year, any treatment of them written today would be out of date by the time it reached print. I shall therefore confine myself to a general account of the function of technical terms in medicine and the principles on which the invention of new words should be determined.

By reason of their euphony and brevity English words of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic origin are unsurpassed in poetry and for the conveyance of simple statements and facts

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn,
Morning's at seven,
The hill-side's dew pearled
The lark's on the wing
The snail's on the thorn,
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

But to express ideas of even moderate complexity we have

to use words of Greek or Latin origin because these words have a capacity for combination that is lacking in Anglo-Saxon and Germanic words. Scientific writing essentially goes only one stage further but with certain differences. Owing to the rapid discovery of new phenomena, their relationship and the growing complexity of ideas concerning them there is an ever expanding need for new terms that does not occur in ordinary speech. These terms must, moreover carry a precise scientific meaning that cannot be conveyed in any other way and, what is even more important, they must have a connotation that goes much further than the terms themselves indicate. Though these terms are individually long they serve as a kind of short hand. Instead of saying "a state in which there is too little of the precursor of thrombin in the blood" we say *hypoprothrombinaemia*.

Medical terms soon find their way to the man-in-the-street who uses them metaphorically and often incorrectly We have long been used to the Cockney who calls his pain "somethink chronic" when he means that it is severe, and to the bright young things who have a "hectic" time in night-clubs. To such expressions are now added "allergic," reaction," "inferiority-complex," "blood-pressure" ("He's got blood pressure") "thrombosis" and many others.

The complexity of the ideas that demand expression requires an exhumation from lexicons and dictionaries of words many of which are familiar only to the most erudite of classical scholars. This, strangely enough, comes at a time when the cultural and educational value of the classics is being called into question. The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, generally regarded as the last stronghold of the classics, have recently decided that under certain conditions Latin is no longer to be a compulsory subject for entrance. What is still more remarkable is that the search for classical terms is being pursued most feverishly in the United States where the classical tradition is weak. In some ways it is regrettable that at the Renaissance Latin was dropped in favour of the vernacular as the international language of science. It may further be observed that the Germans who had succeeded, though with clumsy results, in building up a medical vocabulary by the combination of Teutonic words are now abandoning the

practice and are coming into line with other countries in adopting terms of Graeco-Roman origin.

Certain consequences of the adoption of Graeco-Roman terms may be noted. *Linguistically, the language of medicine* is a mosaic—words of classical origin, mainly substantives, being linked together by short words in the vernacular. A glance at an article in a *language with which we are only* slightly acquainted may show us what the subject is but will not explain it. One of my colleagues who knew no German was laboriously trying to translate an article written in that language. The technical terms, being international presented no difficulty to him, but he found that the article did not make sense. When he brought his problem to me I found that he thought *ohne, without,* meant *with.*

LAY MISCONCEPTIONS

Laymen often pour scorn on the words used by doctors, holding them to be a form of jargon, using this term in its derogatory sense. (According to the O.E.D jargon is applied contemptuously to the language of schools, the terminology of a science or art, or the cant of a class, sect, trade or profession.) Gowers, for instance, in addressing the Osler Club, is reported to have said

> I do not know whether the young woman who is going to have her first baby would be pleased or offended to know that in your eyes she is a primigravida perhaps she would be pleased. But I am pretty sure that her less fortunate sister would resent being called nulliparous, and one who had gone to the opposite extreme would think that the label multiparous indicated a rather inhuman approach to her experiences.*

The short answer to this is that these terms are intended for use by doctors and not by the lay public, that the ladies concerned do not know that they are so labelled and that even if they knew they would be too proud (or perhaps ashamed) of their condition to care. The long answer is that the terms to which Gowers objects are an essential form of shorthand. If on every occasion a doctor were to write a woman pregnant for the first time ' instead of primigravida or the state of a woman who has already had at least one child instead of

* *The Practitioner* Vol. 181 p. 328, 1958.

"multiparous" professional communication would be cluttered up with unnecessary verbiage.

Gowers further takes the doctors to task for saying "intermittent claudication" instead of "lameness from time to time." But most people are for various reasons lame from time to time. "Intermittent claudication" is periodic lameness due to a definite disturbance of the circulatory system. Gowers's criticism shows how dangerous it is for a layman to attempt to interfere with a "closed" language of which he has no knowledge. In spite of their addiction to long words doctors make free use of abbreviations for internal use—"E.N.T. department" for "Oto-rhino-laryngological department." The names of many drugs are similarly abbreviated.

SPECIALIZATION

It must nevertheless be admitted that the creation of technical terms is sometimes carried to inordinate lengths. For specialists to call themselves "thoracologists" or "transfusionists" is pretentiousness at its worst. I shall give further examples in the pages that follow. As the various branches of medicine develop they create their own vocabularies which are understood only by those who habitually use them. This is aggravated by the contribution made by the many sciences on which medicine has come to depend. Analogy with engineering introduces "servo-mechanisms" and "cybernetics"; from physical and colloidal chemistry we have such words as "lyophilic" and "lyophobic"; atomic physics and psychology bring in a vast range of expressions; and the notation of the blood-groups is a kind of algebra. Although this development is inevitable it is easy to see the dangers that accompany it. These have been well expressed by a recent writer:

> Specialization tends to take the form of a closed cult and all new members have to go through a period of initiation in which the apocryphal words of the cult must be mastered. Clearly such words have a high magical value (for they signify the concentrated wisdom of the "specialty"), become irresistible in their perpetual use, dominate the predisposed members of the cult, and, in moments of mystical ecstasy, may lead to new products—Graeco-Latin hybrids, or even full-blown neologisms should the right mutation take place.

Words which are quite unknown, or at least difficult to understand with certainty foreign phrases and proverbs, Latin-Greek French-German-or-Oriental-medical terms, and their hyphenated permutations, have such an appeal that their use in a medical paper appears to strengthen its importance, repel criticism and, perhaps, make its publication a little more probable.*

This animadversion would be of little moment were such articles confined to the appropriate special journals. The trouble arises when they appear in journals designed to interest all members of the profession It is the function of these journals to record the advances that are being made in all branches of medicine. But, as with the daily newspapers, the field covered *is so wide that all the articles cannot be expected to interest* all the readers. Reading must be selective. When, for instance, a neurologist writes, We value his descriptions of orgasmolepsia and of opsoclonus ' he is using terms which very few general readers understand Those occupied in general medicine—general practitioners physicians and surgeons—should be alive to the advances that are being made in the special branches, because, although these may be of no obvious application to their work at the moment, they may one day be of vital concern to them Without, on the one hand, ignoring such articles, or on the other hand plodding through them with the aid of a dictionary they can at least grasp their general purport although they are unable to enter into the details or subject them to critical scrutiny The editorial leaders and annotations which usually cover such articles perform a useful function in helping the general reader to see the subject in perspective. At the same time it is the duty of authors not to be content with arousing the interest of workers in their own field, but to indicate those aspects of their subject that are of general interest, though they cannot be expected to explain every technical term as they go along Unfortunately, the inclusion in general medical literature of terminology that is comprehensible only to specialists cannot be altogether avoided

THE FORMATION OF TECHNICAL TERMS

In the correction of faulty words and the invention of new words attention should be paid to the following points

* G. M. Jacobides, *The Lancet*, August 9th, 1958.

Impeccable Etymology

Very few of us bother to enquire into the derivation of the simple words that we commonly use. Still less, then, are we inclined to question the correctness of words the origins of which are completely unknown to us. Before venturing to pass a new word of Graeco-Roman origin into currency the coiner should not hesitate to consult a classical scholar In deciding whether faulty words should be changed we should be influenced on the one hand by their degree of consolidation and the upheaval that change would cause, and on the other hand by the confusion and impediment to progress that are caused by their retention. Words recently coined can be corrected without causing disturbance, but some are so firmly established that their alteration would be difficult, if not impracticable. Yet there is a welcome tendency to discard even old words in favour of more suitable ones.

Anaphylaxis

The literal meaning is protection up or back, but the word is firmly established for the reverse of protection. A better word would be *antiphylaxis*.

Ataractic

Ataraxia means freedom from mental disturbance. The corresponding adjective should be *ataraxic* not *ataractic*

Autopsy

The literal meaning is "inspection by oneself." The correct synonym for post-mortem examination is *necropsy* (inspection of the dead) to distinguish it from *biopsy* (inspection of living tissue)

Cor triatriatum

This cumbersome term is applied to a heart in which one of the atria is divided into two, making three altogether There is no such word as triatriatum. The correct expression should be *triatrial heart*

Dysarthria

An unsuitable word for difficulty in speaking because of confusion with *arthritis* A better word is *dysphonia*.

Gen

This root has a very wide use in words meaning birth, family, cause, formation origin, etc. It has become adulterated by its popular use in *photogenic* It is unique in being used both in the active and in the passive voice. For example, *pathogenic* means causing disease but *iatrogenic* means caused by doctors. Which voice is intended is usually, but not always, clear from the context. *Nephritogenic*, for example, could be taken to mean either causing or caused by nephritis.

> Immediately after birth, oxygen is certainly a potentially iatrogenic agent.

This seems to mean that if you want your child to become a doctor give him oxygen shortly after birth

Grande Multiparae

This expression is used by obstetricians to mean women who have had a large number of children and especially those in whom, on this account subsequent confinement would carry with it an unusual risk of post partive haemorrhage and various other complications The term is very clumsy and only just defensible grammatically It further suggests large in stature. It might be better to use *pluriparae* for women who have already had more than one child and *multiparae* for women who have had a large number * This however, might be too revolutionary to be acceptable.

Haemophilia

Literally, loving of blood No term could be more absurd A better word would be *haemapexia* (Gk. *αἷμα*, *blood*, *ἀπηξία*, *non-coagulation*) †

Hyperostosis generalisata

There is no such word as *generalisata* The correct word is *diffusa*.

* See below

† For suggesting *pluriparae* and *haemapexia* I am indebted to Mr J D. P Bolton, Fellow and Tutor Queen's College, Oxford.

Hypsarrhythmia

This name has been given to "a grossly abnormal and characteristic electro-encephalic pattern commonly found in patients with infantile spasms." Since ὕψος means height, crown, or summit, it is not clear why this term should have been invented.

Oxidimetry

The literal meaning is measurement of acidity but by ellipsis (p. 123) unwarranted here because it leads to confusion, the term is used to mean measurement of oxygen. Oxygen is so called because of its tendency to form acids (ὀξύς sharp, acid) The correct term should therefore be *oxygenometry*

Sino-auricular

Since *sinus* belongs to the fourth and not to the second declension, the correct term is *sinu-auricular*

Tetralogy (Fallot's)

The proper meaning of *tetralogy* is a group of four discourses or works (e.g "the works of Plato are divided into tetralogies") A better word would be *tetrad*, a group of four

Thalassanaemia

A form of anaemia prevalent in the regions bordering on the Mediterranean is called *thalassanaemia* (Gk. θάλασσα, sea)—an adequate name for the condition. But through careless observation of the written word and ignorance of Greek the little syllable *an* in the middle is very often omitted leaving *thalassaemia* which means "sea in the blood."

-tomy -ostomy, -ectomy

-tomy means a simple cutting, e.g *tenotomy* (by ellipsis, cutting of a tendon) *-ostomy* means making a hole (Gk. στόμα) in an organ so that it opens on the surface of the body e.g *colostomy* *-ectomy* means cutting out, e.g *hysterectomy* These endings are often used wrongly *Lithotomy* should be lithectomy because the stone is cut out, similarly *ovariotomy* should be

ovariectomy I have before me two articles published adjacently, in one of them *tracheotomy* is used throughout, in the other *tracheastomy* *Tracheostomy* is correct.

Single Meaning

In the following terms confusion is caused by their having more than one meaning

Autosite

Literally ' eating oneself " *It is defined as* ' *a monster* able to have a post natal existence ' and also as the larger or more complete of asymmetrical conjoined twins. '

Arthrogryposis multiplex congenita

(Gk. γρυπός, curved) Defined as persistent flexure or contraction of a joint , tetanoid spasm.' It is also an obsolete term for tetany

Centrencephalic

This term was invented by Penfield to describe " the neurone systems symmetrically connected with both hemispheres, co-ordinating their functions. But it is also used as a synonym of *idiopathic*, idiopathic or centrencephalic epilepsy " These two meanings are quite different.

Hyperkinesia

This is variously defined as involuntary movement," ' increase in normal movement of locomotion ' ' excessive movement as that with muscular spasm ' excessive and sustained movement in children not athetotic.

Micelle

This is defined as a submicroscopic unit of protoplasm , " a highly hydrated and charged colloidal aggregate ', a hypothetical vital unit of living matter visible or invisible, made up of one or more molecules and having the power of growth and subdivision (it is not clear how a visible thing can be hypothetical) a supermolecular colloid particle, most often a packet of chain molecules in parallel arrangement.

(According to the O.E.D. the correct word is *micella*, "the hypothetical, solid molecular aggregate of which Nageli considered the organized structure of plants to consist.")

Tachyphylaxis

The literal meaning is rapid protection, and, by extension, short-lived protection. But it is also defined as (1) the decreasing responses to doses given at short intervals (2) the injection of small quantities of toxic agents that give protection and (3) doses of the same extract administered shortly afterwards. Of these, rapid protection and short-lived protection are the only ones that are etymologically justifiable.

EUPHONY AND BREVITY

Words should be reasonably euphonious and as short as possible. Such words as *Reticulohistiocytosis* and *hypercortico-plasmanaemia* are monstrosities.

PEDANTRY

The use of a technical term when an everyday term suffices is sheer pedantry and cannot be too strongly condemned. Examples are *cephalalgia* for headache, *hepatomegaly* for liver enlargement, *electroplexy* for electric shock, *sideropenia* for iron deficiency and *acropachy* and *pachyonia* for clubbing of the fingers. From an American dictionary I quote *bielpy* for expectation of life, *lactoparousness* for suckling one's young and *psychognosium* for reading another's thoughts.

ELLIPSIS

A reasonable use of ellipsis, that is to say the omission of an essential part of a word by common consent, has always been admitted, e.g. *leucopenia* for *leucocytopenia* and *leucocytosis* for *hyperleucocytosis*. There is therefore no reason to deny its use in neologisms. It is permissible to write *natriuresis* for *hypernatriuresis* since sodium is invariably present in the urine and it can be assumed that it is excess of sodium that is under discus-

sion Similarly, deviation from exact derivation is permissible if the meaning is in no doubt. A state of deficient oxygen is adequately described by *anoxia* (lit. no oxygen) since everyone *knows that there must be some oxygen.*

FREQUENCY OF USE

The necessity for a word depends partly on the frequency of its use To say on an isolated occasion *kaluresis* instead of *excessive excretion of potassium* is pedantic, but in a discussion or dissertation on the subject the use of *kaluresis* may be an economical necessity It is becoming the practice to give names to phenomena of extreme rarity and to their several modifications. This is a retrograde step There is for instance no purpose in naming conjoined twins according to the parts of the body by which they are united—*craniopagus thoracopagus, craniothoracopagus, ischiopagus* and so forth Nor is there any need to invent words describing the extremely rare forms of monstrosity—*amelus*, absence of limbs *ectromelus*, absence of whole or parts of limb or limbs, and *hemimelus* incomplete or stunted extremities. An American dictionary has been written to show how a technical term can be formed for every conceivable abnormality It contains, for instance, a long list of terms for different forms of sexual feeling and perversion. Sexual desire for young girls is called *neanirosis*, and for the sight of water, *undinism.* Intercourse between husband and wife is called *virgynation* with a prostitute, *cypripareunia* and between father and daughter, *thygatrilagnia*, and between three persons (rather a difficult feat one would imagine) *troilism.* Lust especially felt in the morning is called *matutolagnia*, a male s enjoyment of being teased, *tantalolagnia* The compiler's ingenuity, however does not prevent his defining adultery as intercourse between the unmarried, he seems to be ignorant of the difference between adultery and fornication

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

Words that have a definite meaning should not be tampered with in such a way that they become meaningless.

Pathophysiology

Physiology is the science of normal function *pathology* is the science of disordered structure and function. *Pathophysiology* is therefore a contradiction in terms and has no meaning

Hypohyperparathyroidism

Since *hypo* and *hyper* cancel each other this term is an absurdity—a cloak for failure to arrive at a diagnosis.

Pseudopseudoleukaemia

Another cloak for failure to arrive at a diagnosis. *Pseudoleukaemia* is a condition that resembles but is not true leukaemia. It obviously cannot be prefixed by another *pseudo-*, otherwise *pseudo-* could be added indefinitely

SYNONYMS

Unnecessary synonyms arise in various ways. The chief of these is that different workers on the same subject invent terms that they fancy regardless of the need for uniformity and the avoidance of confusion e.g *micelle* (see above) has the following synonyms *bioblast*, *bioplast*, *chondrina*, *gemma*, *gemmule idioblast*, *idiosome micrograna pangen*, *physiologic unit*, *plastidule protomere somacule* and *tagmata*.

Eponymy

Many diseases are named after the people who first described them and since such discoveries are often made almost simultaneously in different countries there may be several claimants to the title. Hyperthyroidism is, or has been, called after Parry a Welshman Graves, an Irishman Flajani, an Italian and Basedow a German. In Germany it is still called *Basedow's disease* and in this country it was long called *Graves disease* until it was realised that "Graves" had an ominous implication. *Torulosis* is also known as *cryptococcosis European Blastomycosis* and *Busse-Buschke's Disease* *Hypertelorism*, a condition in which the eyes are abnormally far apart, is also called *Crouzon's Disease Greig's Disease Greig's Hypertelorism* and

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result can only be chaos. Action is clearly needed to keep the present tendency under control. It is welcome news that an international committee has been appointed to achieve simplicity and uniformity in the nomenclature of blood clotting factors. It is to be hoped that similar action will be taken in other departments of medicine without, however discouraging the admission of new words that promote a better understanding of pathological processes.

Hereditary Cranio-facial dysostosis It is much to be desired that eponyms be abolished and diseases given names that describe them succinctly

Clinical and Pathological Names

The abolition of eponyms would not, however, solve the difficulty In general, diseases are first named from their clinical characteristics and, since these characteristics do not alter, the names persist. But when the underlying pathological processes are discovered names describing these processes come to be preferred. For 300 years severe pain over the heart often leading to sudden death was called *angina* (from a supposed Latin word, *angina*, pain) or *angina pectoris* The discovery in modern times of the association of this condition with thrombosis of the coronary arteries gave it the name of *coronary thrombosis* *Exophthalmic goitre* described two of the prominent characteristics—protrusion of the eyes and enlargement of the thyroid. When the disease was found to be due to excessive activity of the thyroid the name was changed to *hyperthyroidism*. As knowledge advances pathological names are changed accordingly *Hypochromic anaemia* is now known as *macrocytic anaemia* because this expresses the main feature of the disease, namely the fact that the red cells are larger than normal.

Synonyms can, however be carried too far Just as mountains are given different names by people living on different sides of them so diseases are given different names according to the aspects that present themselves to different observers. The best example is *coronary thrombosis* Among other names given to it are *coronary failure intermediate coronary syndrome acute coronary insufficiency prodromal coronary artery occlusion*, and *ischaemic heart-disease* *Atheroma* means disease of the intima of the large blood vessels and is so called from the fancied resemblance to gruel (Gk. ἀθήρ gruel) *Arteriosclerosis* means thickening of the media *Atherosclerosis* signifies the combination of these two conditions.

All words have an origin—not in dictionaries but in men's minds—and everyone is free to invent them. But when new words are being coined at the rate of 1 000 a year and when many of these are taken out of their proper meaning and constructed regardless of derivation it is easy to see that the

This suggests that women could not take a degree.

R. For instance, men could

It may be thought that the amended form is open to the same objection, but *for instance* being given greater emphasis, the sex distinction is thrown into the background.

Obscurity may be due to incomprehensible wording. From a W.H.O. Report:

> In local areas small but highly qualified interdisciplinary teams should be formed consisting of, perhaps, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a sociologist, and a journalist.

What does *interdisciplinary* mean?

> Her face is becoming more moon-like.

What kind of moon—new, half, or full?

The misplacement of a decimal point in a prescription can cause death. Although such a catastrophe may not be possible in the following, one cannot be too careful:

> Two further doses were required at eight months and at 16 months after the third treatment.

How many doses were required on each of the two occasions? One, or two? The writer presumably meant

> Two doses were required, one at eight months, the other at sixteen months.

> These two books share the good qualities of being well-informed; interesting to read; persuasive without being insistent; and warmly partisan, but not to the point of mediocrity.

Here are four qualities. How do the two books share them? Two each?

> R. Both these books exhibit good qualities. They are well-informed

Is *mediocrity* the right word? I suggest "warmly but not excessively partisan." Commas would have been preferable to semicolons.

> The only methods of diagnosing biliary dyskinesia accurately are serial cholecystography, one of the methods of manometry and duodenal-intubation examination of bile, which can be misleading.

Which can be misleading? The last, the last two or all three? Presumably the last. If so, why include it in the accurate methods?

XII

Ambiguity and Obscurity

> "Unimportant, of course, I meant," the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, "Important—unimportant—unimportant—important—" as if he were trying which word sounded best.
>
> *Alice in Wonderland.*

Ambiguity and obscurity are of varying degree. Their mildest forms consist of sentences that are capable of more than one interpretation though the intention is clear. Doubt arises either through the reader's lack of familiarity with the words or through his congenital perverseness. A caption to a photograph in *The Times* reads 'Cambridge First Outing in the Fog'. This obviously means that the boat's first outing happened to occur in a fog, but a foreigner unfamiliar with what politicians call our English way of life and only too familiar with our fogs might take it to mean the boat's first of several outings in a fog. The simple sentence 'The patient began to vomit' means that he began a series of acts of vomiting, but a wrong-headed reader might take it to mean that the patient began the act of vomiting, that is to say, he retched. The writer may contend that he does not write for wrong-headed people. This may be true, but he should make allowances for human frailty.

> It is said that bad workmen complain of their tools, but good workmen don't work with bad ones.

With bad tools or with bad workmen?

> N., which is made with potassium, can be taken and serves as a palatable substitute for some patients.

Cannibalistic therapy?

> R. N. ... can be taken and for some patients serves ...

> Men, for instance, could take a degree in Arts.

This suggests that women could not take a degree.

R: For instance, men could

It may be thought that the amended form is open to the same objection, but *for instance* being given greater emphasis, any sex distinction is thrown into the background.

Obscurity may be due to incomprehensible wording From a W H O Report

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What does *interdisciplinary* mean?

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How many doses were required on each of the two occasions? One, or two? The writer presumably meant

> Two doses were required, one at eight months, the other at sixteen months

> These two books share the good qualities of being well-informed; interesting to read; persuasive without being irritating; and warmly partisan, but not to the point of insobriety

Here are four qualities. How do the two books share them? Two each?

> R: Both these books exhibit good qualities. They are well-informed

(Is insobriety the right word? I suggest " warmly but not excessively partisan.) Commas would have been preferable to semicolons.

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Cannibalistic therapy?

> R. N. can be taken and for some patients serves

> Men, for instance, could take a degree in Arts.

The two following examples illustrate the obscurity that results from crowding too many ideas into one sentence

> Since the ingestion of liver in neither group of patients was in any way selective, and since there was no greater incidence of constipation in either group, the conclusion that the incidence of occult intestinal haemorrhage was greater in the anaemic than the non-anaemic group to a highly significant degree is therefore valid, provided that the validity of Gregersen's test is accepted.

After two parallel subordinate clauses of 27 words, the reader has to wade through 21 words between the subject, *conclusion*, and the predicate, *is therefore valid*. Even then his troubles are not over for he has to read a conditional clause that limits the whole sentence.

> R. In neither the anaemic nor the non-anaemic group was the ingestion of liver in any way selective and the groups did not differ in the degree of constipation. If, therefore, we accept the validity of Gregersen's test we may conclude that the incidence of occult intestinal haemorrhage was greater in the anaemic than in the non-anaemic group to a highly significant degree.

> R. and K. tried to find out how interruptions for varying periods in the usually continuous programme of tar painting that had previously been employed to produce cancer on a rabbit's ear would affect the development of the tumour
>
> R. When tar is painted on the rabbit's ear in order to produce cancer it is usually applied continuously R. and K. tried to find out how the result would be affected if the tar were applied discontinuously with varying intervals.

The following example is obscure. I leave it to the reader to discover why

> A man of about 50 had his left leg flexed and useless for many years from some chronic local venous disease, which for the past three years had been complicated by ulceration. The venous valves were destroyed by old thrombo-phlebitis. There was chronic osteomyelitis of the lower ends of the tibia and fibula with much formation of new bone. The skin over his leg was ichthyotic. In spite of prolonged disuse this leg was larger than its fellow which appeared quite healthy and on which the patient walked, and arteriography showed all the arteries in the diseased limb to be unusually dilated. The increase in size of the diseased calf-muscles was not due to muscular hypertrophy but to a great infiltration with fat between atrophied muscle bundles—so much so that a transverse slice of the leg, including the bones, floated.

> Though inhalation studies, therefore, have so far not produced any actual bronchiogenic carcinomas in the experimental animal, a result which could not be expected because of the toxicity of high doses of tobacco smoke and in view of the fact that this has been difficult even with the high concentrations of polycyclics, the

The meaning seems to be

> The only accurately are serial cholecystography and one of the methods of manometry Chromovolumetric estimation of bile can be misleading

> It is a pity that the author did not go into this in more detail, merely confining himself to saying that the mental picture may be indistinguishable from acute or chronic schizophrenia.
> R in more detail. He confines himself to saying
> (*Merely* is redundant.)

From a directive as quoted in a medical journal

> Permission has been given in a limited number of monographs on tablets for the addition of a suitable colouring agent to the coating because unfortunately uncoloured tablets have not been made available. Similar provision has been made for some capsules.

This is beyond my comprehension Why should monographs give permission, and why should their number be limited? If uncoloured tablets were not available, presumably coloured tablets *were* available.

> A small fraction of the life cycle may be touched upon in the embryology course, it is true but if life begins at 40 or even 40 weeks, then most anatomical departments still slumber secure in the womb.

The writer presumably means

> Most anatomical departments, it is true touch upon a small fraction of the life cycle in the embryology course but if they think that life begins at the age of 40 years, or even 40 weeks, they still slumber securely in the womb.

The following illustrates the obscurity that results from crowding sentences with technical terms

> The metabolism of testosterone and methyltestosterone is different. Both hormones are powerfully anabolic and androgenic, but after mucosal absorption in the mouth testosterone produces an increased excretion of 17 ketosteroids but has no effect on the excretion of creatine in the urine. Methyltestosterone however does not materially alter the excretion of 17-ketosteroids, but it does cause creatinuria.

> R Although both testosterone and methyltestosterone are powerfully anabolic and androgenic they differ in their effects on the excretion of 17-ketosteroids and creatine after mucosal absorption Testosterone increases the excretion of 17-ketosteroids but not of creatine. Methyltestosterone does the opposite it increases the excretion of creatine but not of 17-ketosteroids.

Here ambiguity is due partly to the wrongful use of *respectively* (p. 41) and partly to the presence of three pairs of substantives *Carswell* and *Cruveilhier* *plaques* and *disorders* *ischaemia* and *suppression*. Two meanings are possible (1) Carswell and Cruveilhier both attributed the plaques to ischaemia and the disorder in general to the suppression (2) Carswell attributed the plaques to ischaemia and Cruveilhier attributed the disorder in general to the suppression. It is impossible to tell which meaning is intended.

> On average, the widows had been married for sixteen years, and widowed about two when the survey was made a year or two ago, their average age was 41 and 61 of the 72 had children living.

The temporal clause *when the survey* *or two ago* may refer to the preceding clause or to the succeeding clause or to both. If, as seems probable, it refers to both, it should have come at the beginning Moreover the total number of women should have come at the beginning

> R When the survey was made a year or two ago, the 72 widows had been married, on the average, for sixteen years and widowed for about two years. Their average age was 41 and 61 had children living.

> Despite the outward similarities of the villous atrophy and glandular hyperplasia in idiopathic steatorrhoeas with macrocytosis as described, except for one of degree, we find the mucosa in the former insensitive to folic acid.

Except for one of degree makes the whole sentence obscure.

> Differences in gastric motor activity in patients with gastric ulcer and in those with duodenal ulcer have been interpreted as evidence in favour of different aetiologies.

The writer says that differences in gastric motility are found in patients with gastric ulcer and also in patients with duodenal ulcer The meaning he intends to convey is quite different

> R Differences in gastric motor activity between patients with gastric ulcer and those with duodenal ulcer

In the following, punctuation is at fault

> It therefore seemed reasonable to assume on clinical evidence alone that the remaining patients also had influenza.

This means either that the remaining patients had influenza as well as another disease, or that they like the other patients, had influenza. If the latter meaning was intended commas should have been placed before and after *also*

> available evidence has nevertheless indicated an abnormal reaction of the pulmonary and bronchial tissue to tobacco smoke and in one instance the production of carcinoma in this tissue when the smoke condensate was directly applied.

Translation of this unwieldy sentence of 87 words into English is not easy, since, among other reasons *this* in *this has been difficult* has no clear antecedent. Presumably the antecedent is *the production of actual bronchiogenic carcinomas* Assuming this to be the correct interpretation, I suggest

> In the experimental animal, therefore, inhalation studies have so far not produced actual bronchogenic-carcinoma. Indeed, a positive result could not have been expected for two reasons first because high doses of tobacco smoke are toxic, and secondly because the production of these carcinomas has been difficult even with high concentrations of polycyclics. The available evidence nevertheless indicates that pulmonary and bronchial tissue react abnormally to tobacco smoke. In one instance the direct application of smoke concentrate resulted in the production of carcinoma.

> It has been suggested that many combined ulcers may be missed on X-ray examination, thus decreasing their apparent proportion.

This seems to mean

> It has been suggested that the true incidence of combined ulcers may be higher than the apparent incidence since many may be missed on X-ray examination.

> Therapeutics is not, however the only branch of medicine to undergo a change The investigation of patients has also become increasingly complex.

These two sentences do not fit together The first is in the present, the second in the perfect tense Owing to the faulty position of *also* the second might mean that investigation has become increasingly complex in addition to having become something else The writer means that investigation, like therapeutics has become increasingly complex. But he has not said that therapeutics has become increasingly complex, he has said merely that it has changed

> R Like therapeutics, the investigation of patients has become increasingly complex.

> There is the old glimpse of family life—for example the fact that most families sleep in the same room.

The same room does not hold most of the families The meaning is that most families sleep in *one room*.

> Carswell and Cruveilhier respectively attributed the plaques of disease to ischaemia and the disorder in general to the suppression of insensible perspiration.

XIII

Logic and Reasoning

"Contrariwise," continued Tweedledee, "if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."

Through the Looking-Glass.

Logic concerns us in two ways: the abuse of logical terms and the construction of illogical sentences.

ABUSE OF LOGICAL TERMS

When we travel abroad we can enjoy or be poisoned by the food without knowing the names of the dishes. A carpenter who is completely deaf and illiterate can, by following the example of other carpenters and by constant practice, become a highly competent workman without ever learning the names of his tools. Similarly, doctors and others engaged in intellectual pursuits habitually use the processes of logical thought such as deductive and inductive reasoning without knowing the names which logicians have assigned to them. When they do give these processes names, they frequently use them wrongly, or use them when simpler words would serve their purpose equally well or better.

> Since the importance of maintaining the systemic blood pressure has been stressed it now seems logical to review

Logic does not enter into it. The writer has merely given a reason for reviewing.

> R. Harding stressed the importance of maintaining the systemic blood pressure we may now review

AXIOM

Axiom is derived from ἀξιόω, think worthy. The O.E.D. defines it as a proposition that commends itself to general

Here is an opening paragraph that leaves much to be desired

> The basis of sickle-cell disease is the presence of an abnormal haemoglobin molecule which in its reduced state forms aggregates. A multimolecular combination of this haemoglobin, being much less soluble than single molecules, becomes a solid gel this is birefringent and its constituents form a single tactoid.

Since *tactoid* is to be found only in one of the large American medical dictionaries a definition might have been forthcoming The word means a collection of elongated molecules lying with their long axes parallel. The passage contains other faults (*1*) it begins with indirect expression (p 95), (*2*) haemoglobin is itself reduced (from oxy haemoglobin) and cannot be reduced further, (3) the fact that the gel is birefringent (or doubly refractive) is irrelevant

> R Sickle-cell disease is caused by an abnormal haemoglobin—abnormal in that the molecules tend to clump. The resulting compound molecules being much less soluble than single molecules, form a gel. They are elongated, and lie with their long axes parallel. It is this that causes the characteristic deformity of the cells.

One wonders what N M thought when he read this

> These are the opening sentences of a remarkable book, and though written by N M., one of the six other contributors, they set the level of interest, style, and knowledge that explode from every chapter

Postulate

Postulate (*postulatum*, a thing demanded) is "a proposition which is necessarily demanded as a basis of argument" (Jevons) To *postulate* is to assume as a basis of reasoning (O.E.D.)

> It is postulated that the swelling is due to a lack of C.S.F and blood.

Postulated is correct if the writer uses the proposition as a basis for argument, it is incorrect if he merely means *supposed*.

> It was postulated that, compared with controls they would show 1 2 3 4

The writer then proceeds to discuss 1 2 3 and 4. These are not postulates they are questions which he proposes to put in order to find out if they support a supposition he has made.

> R: This supposition was tested in the following ways

Hypothesis

Some confusion enters because *hypothesis*, from ὑπό beneath, and θέσις a placing, has literally exactly the same meaning as *supposition* which we have placed lower in the scale. But while *supposition* implies a casual and indeterminate process, *hypothesis* is a stronger word and implies that much thought has been expended in its framing *Hypothesis* is defined (O.E.D.) as "a provisional supposition which accounts for known facts, and serves as a starting point for further investigation by which it may be proved or disproved." This definition brings out the essential characteristic of *hypothesis*—its provisional nature. *Hypothesis* is thus nearly the same as *postulate* but is slightly stronger

> In the absence of any specific directing hypothesis a large number of biochemical investigations were made.

Hypothesis is correctly used, but *specific directing* is unnecessary because a hypothesis must be both specific and directing *Existing hypothesis* would have met the case.

> The hypothesis is postulated that the common feature of intra-thoracic diseases

Since *hypothesis* and *postulate* have almost the same meaning the *hypothesis is postulated* is a tautology

> R. The hypothesis is put forward. (Or better) It is suggested

acceptance, a well-established or universally considered principle, a self-evident proposition, not requiring demonstration, but assented to as soon as stated. Jevons defines it as a self-evident truth of so simple a character that it must be assumed to be true, and, as it cannot be proved by any simpler proposition must itself be taken as the basis of reasoning Examples "The whole is greater than its part.' If equals be added to equals the wholes are equal."

> It is firmly our view that anaemia is common in elderly people, and that the concept of a physiological anaemia of old age is erroneous. *It follows axiomatically that*, in all such cases, full and detailed inquiry

Here there is no question of any self-evident proposition. The writers have merely stated their opinion and then use it as a basis for discussion.

> R We are convinced that anaemia is erroneous. In all such cases, therefore, full and detailed

POSTULATE, HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY

Through ignorance or carelessness many writers use the various expressions of thought processes indiscriminately expressions such as *idea notion, suggestion, surmise premise speculation assumption, supposition postulate hypothesis* and *theory*

> Bleeding presents initially more commonly than most psychosomatic theorists would have us believe perhaps therefore an alternative hypothesis is needed.

Here *theory* and *hypothesis* are used as though they are synonymous

> R Initial bleeding presents more commonly than most of those who are wedded to a psychosomatic hypothesis would have us believe perhaps

The writer of the following goes further for he muddles up four expressions *idea theory hypothesis* and *suggestion*.

> J has restated an old idea that J a theory has been invoked by C. in a hypothesis that He suggests that

Let us therefore try to straighten things out. At the lowest end of the scale (philosophically speaking) are *idea, notion view speculation, assumption* and *supposition* which need no explanation Next to them come *postulate* and *hypothesis* and at the top *theory*

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Some confusion enters because *hypothesis*, from *hypo* beneath, and *thesis* a placing, has literally exactly the same meaning as *supposition* which we have placed lower in the scale. But while *supposition* implies a casual and indeterminate process, *hypothesis* is a stronger word and implies that much thought has been expended in its framing. *Hypothesis* is defined (O.E.D.) as "a provisional supposition which accounts for known facts, and serves as a starting point for further investigation by which it may be proved or disproved." This definition brings out the essential characteristic of *hypothesis*—its provisional nature. *Hypothesis* is thus nearly the same as *postulate* but is slightly stronger

> In the absence of any specific directing hypothesis a large number of biochemical investigations were made.

Hypothesis is correctly used, but *specific directing* is unnecessary because a hypothesis must be both specific and directing *Existing hypotheses* would have met the case.

> The hypothesis is postulated that the common feature of intrathoracic diseases

Since *hypothesis* and *postulate* have almost the same meaning the *hypothesis is postulated* is a tautology

> R. The hypothesis is put forward. (Or better) It is suggested

Theory

When a hypothesis is crowned by general and permanent acceptance (so far as anything in science is permanent) and brings together a number of truths it becomes a theory. Theory which has the strange derivation, θεωρία contemplation, is 'a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment, and is propounded or accepted as accounting for the known facts a statement of what are held to be general laws, principles or causes of something known or observed' (O.E.D.) Examples are Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection and the Mendelian Theory of Inheritance. Although the distinction between *theory* and *hypothesis* is not hard-and fast, *theory* should be reserved for something that is really big. The opposite of *theory* is *practice*.

> The conventional theory that the shortness of the female urethra leaves it as an inadequate barrier against the ascent of wandering organisms has not been vigorously disputed, largely because of the difficulty of supplying a scientific alternative explanation.

From the definition of *theory* given above it is clear that a theory cannot be conventional and that *explanation* is not equivalent to *theory*.

> R. In the absence of any alternative, the view that wandering organisms has not been seriously disputed. (*Vigorously* is too strong a word. *Scientific* is superfluous.)

> This theory postulates

A theory cannot demean itself by postulating.

> R. According to this theory

Curiously enough *theory* which is the strongest word of all, is the one most abused. After a crime we frequently read that the police have a theory as to the culprit.

PREMISE (OR PREMISS)

A *premise* is part of a *syllogism*. A *syllogism* is a conclusion drawn from two propositions containing two terms one of which appears in both. Example

(1) All infectious diseases are due to micro-organisms
(2) Measles is an infectious disease
(3) Therefore measles is due to micro-organisms.

(1) is the major premise (2) is the minor premise.

Premise should not be used in the sense of *assumption* or *reason*, nor should it be used when a simpler word will do.

> The whole premise for the use of stored autogenous marrow is the known damage which results following the application of radiation to large areas of marrow-containing spaces.

The whole premise does not make sense. Presumably what is meant is *the only reason*. If so,

> R1 The only reason for marrow is the danger known to occur after radiation of

DEDUCTION

Deduction means reasoning from the general to the particular it is something based on a truth already known. E.g., "In all patients with carcinoma of the breast secondary growths are liable to develop in the spine. Therefore they may develop in this patient who has carcinoma of the breast."

A priori (from the earlier part) is the Latin term for deduction. It also means reasoning from assumed axioms and not from experience. "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds," says Dr Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide* unmoved by his terrible experience to the contrary

INDUCTION

Induction is the opposite of deduction it means reasoning from the particular to the general, the framing of general laws from particular instances found by experience. E.g., one might say "All the bacteria that I have studied are destroyed by heat. Therefore all bacteria are destroyed by heat." As it happens this would be a correct induction, but since induction is based on experience it is more dangerous than deduction. E.g., one might say "I have seen three patients with rheumatic fever All had red hair Therefore all patients with rheumatic fever have red hair" This would be a false induction because it would show that the writer's experience of rheumatic fever is limited.

A posteriori (from the hinder part) is the Latin term for induction. It also means reasoning based on experience or experiment and not on axioms.

ILLOGICAL SENTENCES

> The question of a viral aetiology for multiple sclerosis has been reviewed by J and K. there is no positive evidence in its favour nor does the evidence preclude such a possibility

A question cannot be supported, or fail to be supported, by evidence. The phrases before and after *nor* are antithetic and should be joined by *but* so as to read *in its favour, but the evidence* A better construction is

> J and K. have reviewed the possibility of a viral origin of multiple sclerosis. They have found that the evidence, though not supporting it, does not preclude it.

> The critical investigation is the finding of gross histological changes.

An investigation may or may not result in a finding, it cannot *be* a finding

> R The critical investigation is the search for
> (or) The diagnosis is confirmed by the finding of

> *The importance of laboratory work is not to prove that smoking is a cause of cancer in man.*

Importance cannot prove anything

> R: The purpose of

> If the donor's corpuscles and the recipient's serum were not obviously antagonistic, the transfusion proceeded with a clear conscience.

A transfusion cannot have a conscience.

> R antagonistic the operators performed a transfusion with a clear conscience.

The following two examples through the omission of a little word, defy the laws of logic.

> Aortography results in slight inconvenience or risk even to a seriously ill patient.
> R Aortography results in only slight (or better) Even to a seriously ill patient aortography causes only slight

> Whilst the Parliamentary answers reported in give scanty information about the present staffing ratios of different regions, they give absolutely no information at all about the state of affairs at the inception of the National Health Service.

The scantiness of information on the first point is not properly related to the absence of information on the second

Whilst is therefore out of place. *Absolutely no information at all* is hysterical unless one is writing for children.

> R. The parliamentary answers reported in give only scanty information about the staffing *ratios of different regions* and no information about the state

THE NON SEQUITUR

Writers should be sure that they know what conclusions they wish their readers to draw from their statements

> This was the first occasion on which the occlusion of the basilar artery was demonstrated angiographically during life. The patient died six weeks later.

Did the patient die because he was the first to undergo this operation?

ILLOGICAL SENTENCES

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The scantiness of information on the first point is not properly related to the absence of information on the second

> When we pass across the grey band which divides what is physiological from what is pathological, and enter the dark area which is the true domain of pathology we are in a territory full of pitfalls and quagmires.

The writer transfers his figure from shades of light and darkness to the Slough of Despond.

Metaphors that are deliberately mixed may be very effective, as when a University don called a proposal to which he objected the thin end of the cloven hoof, or when the Report of a recent Royal Commission was called a blue-book filled with white-wash.

Incongruous Combination of Metaphors

> Pediatrics, it seems to me, must also cut its coat according to its cloth and grin and bear its cross as best it may

Not content with pointing out the need for economy the writer feels he must go further and represent it as a supreme sacrifice.

Inappropriate Metaphors

> The cervix performed a Pilgrim's Progress, eventually reaching the introitus.

What nonsense!

> But if they [i.e. students] think of medical practice as an endeavour to guide them [i.e. their patients] so far as may be from childhood to old age through the squalls and doldrums so that they slip as seldom as possible over that invisible equator which divides health and disease

Slipping over the equator whether visible or invisible, through squalls and doldrums would be enough to make the hardiest sailor seasick.

By the same writer:

> As every teacher of the so-called basic sciences experienced in spreading pearls before the jaundiced eyes of students hell-bent on doctoring will agree, how the medical student trains himself depends on what view he takes of medical practice.

The teacher has let himself go with a vengeance. Apart from his wild metaphors he has given a display of intellectual, or rather academic, arrogance. Most people would consider being hell-bent on doctoring a virtue in students. One may

XIV
Figurative Expression

> But you've no idea what a difference it makes, mixing it with other things—such as gunpowder and sealing-wax.
>
> *Through the Looking-Glass.*

METAPHORS

Metaphor is an extension of idiom (p 54) It is a figure in which ' a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object to which it is not properly applicable" (O.E.D) Metaphors are of two kinds dead and living The distinction between these is not clear-cut, but may be illustrated as follows A dead metaphor is one in which we are unconscious of the original meaning *as when we say ' He was between the* devil and the deep sea. A live metaphor is one in which we are reminded however slightly, of the original meaning, as in *He came through with flying colours* " In medicine dead metaphors are used just as freely as in other forms of literature, but live metaphors should be used with restraint. In describing purely scientific aspects of his subject the medical writer's business is to express himself simply and without adornment. It need hardly be pointed out that it would be out of place and possibly misleading to describe a patient as having a chip on his shoulder or being hot under the collar In discussing the wider aspects of medicine, as when giving an address at the opening of a session of a medical school the writer (or rather the speaker) of course has more freedom but even here he should exercise restraint in the use of allusions.

Metaphors may be faulty through being mixed, or incongruously combined, or inappropriate.

Mixed Metaphors

> He warned the meeting that the public were apt to look down *on the profession with disfavour* " when we batten down and blow cold over things of this nature."

No grounds for complacency

The figure of only "0"/ₒ mean gives no grounds for complacency

There is less ground for complacency about the influence of programme content.

The desire for further improvement is certainly a virtue but need it always be expressed in the same words?

Cinderella

There is hardly a specialty whose exponents in a wail of self-pity do not from time to time call the Cinderella of medicine. Is it asking too much of specialists of all kinds to leave poor Cinderella alone?

Justice

" Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done." An overworked quotation.

At the cross-roads

This is a favourite title for addresses by leaders of specialties. Let us consider what it means. When one arrives at cross-roads one has the choice of three ways straight on, to the left, or to the right. A triple choice of this sort rarely presents itself in any walk of life, and it becomes quite clear from reading the articles that there is no question of any choice. The writers do not present any alternatives. Completely forgetting the title, which they have apparently chosen for want of something better they merely describe what they think the future has in store.

Medicine an art as well as a science

" We must never forget (or we must always remember) that medicine is an art as well as a science." For many years past we have been told this over and over again so frequently in fact, that there is not the smallest chance of our forgetting it. To my mind its constant repetition indicates lamentable mental stagnation and lack of originality

Let us hear no more about general practitioners being " the backbone of the profession," " the policemen on the beat " and " the front-line troops in the fight against disease." G.P.s have long ago seen through this blarney

reasonably ask 'Whose eyes are jaundiced? The students or the teacher's?

But let us end this section on a less acrimonious note. When using a metaphor writers should take the trouble to acquaint themselves with the circumstances A book reviewer writes

> Every year it has attracted an even larger number of followers, and as the pack swarms across the field, R. and S. ride buoyantly ahead with resounding cries of tally-ho!—the acknowledged leaders of an enthusiastic hunt.

'Hold hard gentlemen! Don t override hounds." Incidentally packs of hounds do not swarm

Don't mix the sports

> With her—and it's usually a she—I know I'm on a good wicket. She will press on like mad to retain her world title.

CLICHÉS

A cliché is a hackneyed saying, its original meaning being a stereotyped block used in printing Whether clichés are of English classical or modern foreign origin they should be used only when there is no straight forward equivalent and when they express a truth in words formulated long ago and not since improved e.g *in vino veritas* They should not be used to display the writer's erudition, or when they are no improvement on simpler expressions

> The general practitioner anaesthetist has become a *rara avis*.

Why not has become rare ?

They should not be used when they have no specific application to the subject

> The serotypes like the poor were always with us.

This is shoddy stuff, for there are innumerable things that are always with us Serotypes are no special case

Below are some clichés that deserve burial

Ludicrously inadequate

A stereotyped complaint of the accommodation provided for departments and the time alloted to subjects in the curriculum

No grounds for complacency

> The figure of only 70% union gives no grounds for complacency
>
> There is less ground for complacency about the influence of programme content.

The desire for further improvement is certainly a virtue, but need it always be expressed in the same words?

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VOGUE WORDS

'Every now and then," writes Fowler, 'a word emerges from obscurity or even from nothingness, or a merely potential and not actual existence, into sudden popularity It is often, but not necessarily, one that by no means explains itself to the average man, who has to find out its meaning as best he can.

Ready acceptance of vogue words [as Fowler calls them] seems to some people the sign of an alert mind, to others it stands for the herd instinct and lack of individuality" To this I may add that on the principle of calling a spade a spade the use of these words is sheer affectation the more so when writers, ignorant of their original meaning, extend them to contexts that only make them ridiculous.

Definitive

Definitive has recently come into fashion especially in reviews of biographies 'This is a definitive biography of so-and so." It means *final* or *permanent* (in so far as such things can be final or permanent) as opposed to *provisional* It is now being used loosely and incorrectly for *definite*, *standard* *effective* *adequate*

> to establish a definitive diagnosis.
>
> R definite.

> There still remains a place however for a larger definitive work of reference.

A work of reference, of all things, cannot be final

> R *standard* or *authoritative*.

> Until some fifteen years ago, thyroidectomy was the only definitive treatment of practically all types of goitre.

The writer presumably means *effective*

> The right place for that skilled attention is in a fully equipped hospital where definitive treatment is available.
>
> R *adequate* or *appropriate*. (Omit *in*.)

In the following, *definitive* is meaningless

> The definitive form of therapy adopted in 203 cases is shown in Table I

Discipline

This word is now being applied to all the different branches of medicine and science. Though not objectionable in its proper place, in the following it is absurd

> Our discipline in medicine is concerned with the application of physical methods in restoring the subnormal to normal, or as near to normal as possible.
>
> R: Our task is to restore, so far as we can, the subnormal to normal by physical methods.

Overall

This means *over all the others combined*. "In 1959 the Conservatives had an overall majority of 100." There is no reason for using it in the sense of *total* as in

> It was decided to shorten the overall treatment time.

Serendipity

This has a strange and far-fetched origin. It was coined in 1754 by Horace Walpole who derived it from a fairy tale, *The Princes of Serendip* (Serendip being an old name for Ceylon). These princes "were always making discoveries of things they were not in quest of." Hence it means quite simply discovery by accident, such as the discovery of penicillin. It seems to have been buried unmourned and forgotten until W. B. Cannon exhumed it in *The Way of an Investigator*. The sooner the ghastly remains return to the grave the better. What sense can be made of the following for instance?

> The quest of an oral diuretic has gone on without benefit of comparable serendipity.

Spectrum

Already extended from its original use in light to the range of activity of antibiotics, this word now seems capable of indefinite application.

> There is a wide spectrum between the extremes of pure severe stenosis and gross incompetence unaccompanied by narrowing of the valvular orifice.

The writer should have been content with *range*.

Target

This word came into prominence during the war as a figurative word for *aim*. It is frequently misused.

> There is the anticlimax, in that the target has been achieved which has for some time provided the spur.

Here we have a spurred target, whatever that may be.

Incidentally, *it is not clear how an achievement can be an anticlimax.*

Underprivileged, Overprivileged

Here is yet another example of the extension of a vogue word. Owing to the prevailing deterministic philosophy, *underprivileged* has become a recognized euphemism for *poor*. In the following, the writer, evidently accepting the thesis that wealth, *as well as* poverty, *is* undeserved, writes

> The possibility that this modern epidemic [i.e. of ischaemic heart-disease] might be partly due to overprivileged eating has had far reaching effects on the attitude of clinicians to the study of nutrition. Western privileged diets differ in many ways from primitive rural diets.

What the writer meant was, quite simply, *high living* or *eating rich food*

QUOTATIONS

No advice is sounder or more necessary than verify your references. It is particularly applicable to sayings that have become so familiar and hackneyed that writers think they know them accurately and do not take the trouble to look them up

> *Floris corenat opus.*
>
> In *status quo* (From a Canadian journal.)

Ablative case please. *In statu quo* but *the status quo*

> The attempt to psychoanalyse the Jewish National revival and its achievements is the more of a travesty in that it ignores the blood and sweat and tears that have gone into the making of the new Israel.

This is a poor paraphrase of Sir Winston Churchill's immortal words.

It goes without saying that quotations should be attributed without equivocation to their authors and not to someone who has repeated them

> More than a quarter of a century elapsed before the subject as a whole was brought to life again—"the years that the locust has eaten," as R. has described the three decades

What about the Old Testament Prophet Joel? He wrote

(Joel 2. 25) "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." (Italics mine.)

Writers should avoid approximations to familiar quotations An example is the title of an article which reads "Too Solid Flesh." This suggests either that the writer has an inaccurate memory of Hamlet's words or that he is trying not to copy him.

XV

Spelling

"That's the reason they're called lessons," the Gryphon remarked "because they lessen from day to day!"

Alice in Wonderland.

As a nation we pride ourselves on our gift for compromise. We certainly exhibit it in our spelling—a compromise between the rationality of derivation and the expediency of usage. In some words spelling has reached a form that is generally accepted with little regard to derivation, in others, usage has resulted in the appearance of alternative forms whose correctness is the subject of dispute. I shall deal first with accepted forms that cause difficulty and afterwards with alternative or disputed forms.

ACCEPTED SPELLING

-able, -ible

According to the O.E.D *-ible* represents the L. *-ibilis* as in *audible*, *possible* but is often displaced by *-able* in words that have come through French or are derived from English verbs, as in *tenable* *referable* Since this rule does not help the average writer I give below some of the words ending in *-able* and *-ible* that are found in medicine Words ending in mute *e*, such as *change*, always take *-able*

Amenable	Accessible
Available	Admissible
Excusable	Convertible
Indispensable	Digestible
Insurmountable	Extensible
Interminable	Flexible
Intractable	Immiscible

Preferable	Incontrovertible
Sizeable, or sizable	Negligible
Tasteable, or tastable	Permissible
	Reducible
	Reversible
	Suggestible
	Susceptible
	Tangible

In the following both endings may be used collaps- diffus- prevent-.

Single and double ls

Distil, or distill
Instalment
Instil, or instill
Fulfil
Skilful
Paralleled

In the following, differences in spelling affect meaning·

Dependant (noun) "He has three dependants."	Dependent (adjective) "He is dependent on her."
Envelop (verb)	Envelope (noun)
Practice (noun) "His practice is in Birmingham."	Practise (verb) "He practises in Birmingham."

Among other words that cause difficulty are

Aerate, not aërate
Develop
Dilatation, not dilation, the derivation being from L. *dilatatio*. But dilator should be dilater
Educationist
Embarrassment.

ALTERNATIVE AND DISPUTED SPELLING

When a writer receives proofs of his article he may find that the spelling is not as he wrote it. The changes will have been made by compositors who are compelled to follow the "house rules" of the printers who employ them. These rules differ in different printing-houses. They exist, not because printers

think they know better, but because they often meet words that are illegible and spelling that is careless and inconsistent. They have thus been forced to adopt one or other of alternative forms Why, then, need writers worry if printers are there to correct their mistakes? The reasons are several. In the general interest of culture it is a good thing to know how to spell even if what one writes is read by only one person. Moreover, writing is often intended not for print but for duplication by people who are not guided by house-rules. Where there are alternative forms of spelling writers must take care to be consistent. They must not write *knee jerk* in one place and *knee jerk* in another It should be remembered that, house rules notwithstanding, writers have the last word. They can insist on their own spelling, for it is from them and not from printers that reforms can come.

-ise, ize

The battle is between derivation and uniformity, the sides being fairly evenly matched The O.E.D , the University Presses of Oxford and Cambridge, and Partridge uphold *ize* on the ground that in nearly all the words concerned the ending is derived from Greek *izein*, *ise* being a French corruption. *On the other hand many English printers, supported by* Gowers and Vallins favour *ise* because the ending brings the words concerned into line with those that are not derived from *izein* and must be written *ise* Among these are *Circumcise, comprise, devise disguise, excise exercise, improvise incise supervise* But phonetics should be taken into account. Since we have a letter which denotes a soft sibilant we should use it. The advantage is apparent in the word *emphasize* It is thus last consideration that weighs with me. Excluding the list given above, I favour *ize* and would write *deodorize, hypnotize idealize, immunization, civilization*, etc. When preceded by *y*, *s* is preferable—*analyse paralyse*

Mute *e* before *-ment*

On the question whether the *e* should be retained or omitted opinion is divided *develop(e)ment acknowledg(e)ment judg(e)ment lodg(e)ment* I prefer omission.

-ection, -exion

-ection as in *connection* is the commoner form, agreeing with the adjectival form *-ective*. An exception is *flexion*.

-ician, -itian

-ician, as in *physician*, *paediatrician* is the rule, but for some reason experts in dietetics call themselves *dietitians*.

In the following pairs both forms are correct

Alignment	Alinement
Gray	Grey
Hiccup	Hiccough
Laissez faire	Laisser faire
Premise (logic)	Premiss

In the following pairs the words on the left are preferable

Ageing	Aging
Dissociate	Disassociate
Disk	Disc
Dryly	Drily
Liquefy	Liquify
Medieval	Mediaeval
Primeval	Primaeval

MEDICAL WORDS

In the spelling of medical words even the best general dictionaries and lay authorities are misleading, or perhaps it would be better to say that their advice is not always followed by the profession. For instance some write *spinal chord*, *vocal chords*. Fowler says that *anchylosis* is the established form, and the O.E.D. makes the astonishing statement "osteoarthritis, now usually *arthritis*." For a detailed account of the subject I refer readers to my *Medical Terms: Their Origin and Construction*. Here I give a few of the words that cause special difficulty

Arytaenoid
Ballottement
Caesarean, or Caesarian
Chiropody (pronounced *ki* as in *kite*)

Diphtheria (pronounced *diff*, not *dip-*)
Dysdiadochokinesis
Ecchymosis
Extravert, not extrovert
Fetichism, or fetishism
Intussusception
Kaliuresis
Oophoron (pronounced *Oh-off*)
Lacrimal not lachrymal
Natriuresis
Ophthalmic (pronounced *off* not *op-*)
Pityriasis
Tache cerébrale

Rh and rrh-

In words beginning with *rh*, e.g *rheumatic*, *h* is the English representation of the Greek rough breathing c placed over the *r*, thus *ρ* *In Greek, when rh is preceded by a prefix,—dia, haemo-* etc. —*r* is duplicated (*rr*) and the rough breathing is omitted from the written word though retained in the spoken word. In English and other Western languages *-rrh-* has been conventionally adopted as a phonetic representation of the Greek, e.g *diarrhoea, haemorrhage* In short, the rule is *rh* at the beginning of a word and *rrh-* after all prefixes E.g *haemo-rheology* should be *haemorrheology*

PLURALS

In the formation of plurals there are no hard and fast rules. Sometimes the classical plural is used, sometimes *s* is added to the singular

Agenda	Agendas
Alkali	Alkalis
Analysis	Analyses
Apex	Apices
Appendix	Appendices
Axis	Axes
Basis	Bases
Calyx	Calyces
Coagulum	Coagula

Carcinoma	Carcinomas or carcinomata
Cortex	Cortices
Crisis	Crises
Datum	Data
Enema	Enemas
Focus	Foci
Formula	Formulae
Fungus	Fungi
Genus	Genera
Gymnasium	Gymnasiums or gymnasia
Lacuna	Lacunae, or lacunas
Lamina	Laminae
Larva	Larvae
Matrix	Matrices
Maximum	Maxima
Medium	Media
Minimum	Minima
Mosquito	Mosquitoes
Naevus	Naevi
Nostrum	Nostrums
Nucleus	Nuclei
Papilla	Papillae
Sanatorium	Sanatoria, or sanatoriums
Sarcoma	Sarcoma or sarcomata
Sinus	Sinuses
Species	Species
Spectrum	Spectra
Speculum	Specula
Thesis	Theses

HYPHENS

In the use of hyphens there are no hard and fast rules. With the increasing use of longer and still longer words the tendency is to omit them except when they are demanded in the interests of clarity. A hyphen is unnecessary in *electroplexy*, optional in *electro-coagulation*, but advisable in *electro-encephalography*. Hyphens are usual:

1. In words compounded of English nouns: *cattle-yards, birth-rate, blood-flow, blood-pressure*

Diphtheria (pronounced *diff*, not *dip*-)
Dysdiadochokinesis
Ecchymosis
Extravert, not extrovert
Fetichism, or fetishism
Intussusception
Kaliuresis
Oophoron (pronounced *Oh-off*)
Lacrimal, not lachrymal
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In words beginning with *rh*, e.g *rheumatic h* is the English representation of the Greek rough breathing c placed over the *r*, thus ῥ In Greek, when *rh* is preceded by a prefix,—*dia*, *haemo*- etc. —*r* is duplicated (*rr*) and the rough breathing is omitted from the written word though retained in the spoken word In English and other Western languages -*rrh*- has been conventionally adopted as a phonetic representation of the Greek, e.g *diarrhoea*, *haemorrhage* In short the rule is *rh* at the beginning of a word and *rrh*- after all prefixes E.g *haemorheology* should be *haemorrheology*

PLURALS

In the formation of plurals there are no hard and fast rules. Sometimes the classical plural is used sometimes *s* is added to the singular

Agenda	Agendas
Alkali	Alkalis
Analysis	Analyses
Apex	Apices
Appendix	Appendices
Axis	Axes
Basis	Bases
Calyx	Calyces
Coagulum	Coagula

is not followed by Americans, who write, e.g., *traveled, leveled* but the one exception to the British rule—*paralleled*—is sometimes written *parallelled* in America. In words ending in *ll*, the second *l* is usually retained before suffixes in America, but dropped in Britain—American *enrollment, skillful*

-ce -se

Americans write defense, offense but *practice* for the noun and both *practice* and *practise* for the verb.

In some words silent endings are omitted *program, catalog*

Ligatures æ (*ae*) and *œ* (*oe*) In America the *a* and *o* are suppressed *edema* for *œdema*. The ligature is etymologically inaccurate and is a clumsy device It does not even fulfil any function, for it fails to retain the correct pronunciation. *œ* is supposed to represent the Greek *οι*, e.g. oesophagus. The early English *y* (ysophagus) was more accurate

Britons writing for American journals should follow British usage leaving the changes to be made by editors and printers.

2 When a prefix ending in a vowel is followed by a word beginning with the same vowel *re-examine, re-exploration, pia-arachnoid, intra-abdominal* and especially when the vowels, spoken separately have different sounds *co-operative unco-operative, unco-ordination.*

3 After *non* *non-toxic*

4 In unusual words. E g at first sight, *restenosis* is puzzling *Re stenosis* makes the meaning clear

Except in very long words hyphens are not used to separate different vowels *periarteritis, hemianopia,* nor are they used after *inter, e g intervertebral*

Hyphens must not be inserted at the end of uncompleted words. (These are called floating hyphens.) For " It measured five or six-eighths write ' It measured five-eighths or six-eighths ' For pre and postoperative write ' preoperative and postoperative

In a few instances the hyphen is used in the adjectival expression but not in the corresponding adverbial expression *He made a post mortem examination " It was found* post mortem.

AMERICAN SPELLING

The chief differences between American and British spelling are as follows

-er for *-re*, as in *center, fiber* Exceptions after *c* where *-re* is used to preserve the hard *c*, e.g *acre*

Suppression of *u* after *o* as in *color, humor* British practice is thoroughly inconsistent we drop the *u* in some adjectival forms but not in others—*humorous, colouring*

ise ize (p 152) *-ize* is preferred.

F *ic ical* The American suppression of *al* after *ic*, as in *physiologic* seems to be more correct since, *ic* being adjectival *al* is redundant. Note however that *logic* is a noun and that *economic* and *economical* have different meanings, as also have *historic* and *historical*

-exion, -ection (p 153) Americans almost invariably use *-ection*

-l , -ll American and British usages are at sixes and sevens. The British practice of doubling the *l* before derivates

is not followed by Americans, who write, e.g., *traveled*, *leveled* but the one exception to the British rule—*paralleled*—is sometimes written *parallelled* in America. In words ending in *ll*, the second *l* is usually retained before suffixes in America, but dropped in Britain—American *enrollment*, *skillful*.

-ce -se

Americans write defense, offense but *practice* for the noun and both *practice* and *practise* for the verb

In some words silent endings are omitted *program*, *catalog*

Ligatures æ (ae) and œ (oe) In America the æ and œ are suppressed *edema* for *œdema*. The ligature is etymologically inaccurate and is a clumsy device. It does not even fulfil any function, for it fails to retain the correct pronunciation. œ is supposed to represent the Greek οι, e.g. oisophagus. The early English *Y* (ysophagus) was more accurate.

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XVI

Punctuation

Prologue, spoken by Quince.

If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think, we come not to offend,
But with good will. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end.
Consider then we come not in despite
We do not come as minding to content you,
Our true intent is All for your delight,
We are not here That you should here repent you,
The actors are at hand and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know.

Theseus. This fellow doth not stand upon points.

Lysander. He hath rid his prologue like a rough colt he knows not the stop. A good moral, my lord it is not enough to speak, but to speak true.

Hippolyta. Indeed he hath played on his prologue like a child on a recorder a sound, but not in government.

Theseus. His speech was like a tangled chain nothing impaired, but all disordered.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V Sc. I

Too many writers think punctuation does not matter Let the above example disabuse them.

Punctuation is of two kinds, these may be called semantic and typographical (or conventional) Semantic punctuation is that which affects meaning and influences the reader either consciously or subconsciously It facilitates his understanding unobtrusively it is an adjunct—a very necessary adjunct—to the printed word, it brings out the relationship between the words and phrases of which a sentence is composed, and between a sentence and those that precede and follow it, and it stresses the emphasis that in the spoken word is indicated by pauses and by the inflection of the voice Typographical punctuation, on the other hand has no effect on meaning though discrimination in its use may have some foundation in

logic. It is mainly the concern of the printer and is completely ignored by nearly all readers. Examples are the insertion or omission of a full-stop after an abbreviation (Mr or Mr.), and whether a full-stop should precede or follow a terminal bracket—.) or). They are best seen in the references at the end of books, chapters and articles.

In this chapter I shall deal mainly with semantic punctuation, for this is very much the concern of writers. I must, however, make some reference to typographical punctuation, because some conscientious writers worry unnecessarily about it. It matters little whether they write Dr or Dr.—some authorities advise the one, some the other—but they may scratch their heads over the choice.

G. V. Carey, whose book, *Mind the Stop*,* is an admirable exposition of the subject, says that punctuation "is governed two-thirds by rule and one-third by personal taste." One may add that taste, like a great many other things, varies from time to time, the modern tendency being in favour of light rather than heavy punctuation. A safe guide is to use the least punctuation that clarifies the meaning, imparts crispness, and avoids jerkiness.

Punctuation cannot be dissociated from syntax, style, and the construction of sentences. For example, everyone knows that a full-stop must come at the end of a sentence, but the real problem is the proper length of the sentence. Similarly, the correct use of absolute construction, participial phrases, conjunctions, and so forth depends upon the way in which these are pointed. This chapter must therefore be taken in conjunction with those in which these subjects have been discussed. This is partly why I have sometimes found it advisable to insert a correction of punctuation in addition to the correction of a grammatical or stylistic fault.

SPECIAL USES OF THE FULL-STOP

A full-stop is always used after an abbreviation in the form of a single letter—i.e., e.g., and in shortened forms of words such as Nov., Wed. In titles there is some latitude. Mr, Mrs, Dr may or may not be pointed. Mme and Mlle should not be

* Cambridge University Press. New Edition, 1958.

pointed Fowler tried to establish a rule that a full stop should be used only when the abbreviation does not end in the last letter of the full word—Capt., Gen., Prof., but Cpl (Corporal) This rule has not found favour In the plurals of units of measurement the abbreviation is not followed by *s*, "It measured 7 in.' 'He gave 10 cc.' Exception MSS. (manuscripts)

Three full stops— —indicate omission of part of a quotation. There are numerous examples in this book.

In cross headings of chapters and paragraphs printed in capitals *the full stop is omitted* *Examples*

SYSTOLIC MURMURS

Telling the Cancer Patient

In shoulder *headings*, i e those that come on the *left-hand side of the page, the full-stop is inserted only when the texts follows on the* same line. Examples

Treatment

Patients should be given

Treatment. Patients should be given

THE COMMA

Since of all stops the comma indicates the shortest pause, it may be thought the easiest to use In point of fact it is the one in whose use the widest latitude is permissible and at the same time the one that is most liable to misuse. *It is inserted* when it is not needed, omitted when it is needed and used when a *heavier stop is needed*

INCORRECT INSERTION

1 Between subject and predicate. Writers are sometimes tempted to insert a comma after a *lengthy subject*

> The problem of finding sufficient accommodation for aged people who have no relatives to look after them and are incapable of looking *after themselves, will become more acute as the years* go by
>
> R themselves will

2. Within an absolute clause (the English equivalent of the Latin ablative absolute) "The rain, having stopped, the patients were allowed out." "The rain" is left without a verb. R "The rain having stopped,

3. After *and* and *or* when the phrases they separate are short e.g. "He understood what I said and answered coherently" "He would like to get out of bed or at least sit up." These are correct.

> The pandemic of influenza reached England in August 1957 and spread to the north by September.
> R 1957 and spread

But needs a comma because it is qualifying or restrictive. E.g "He would like to get out of bed, but the sister will not let him."

4. Between *between* and *and*

> This book is an attempt to bridge the gap between the old attitude of fear and the new attitude of understanding towards the mentally ill.
> R fear and

INCORRECT OMISSION

A comma is needed after as well as before, a parenthetic clause. (Note this last sentence.)

> It is possible, therefore, if not certain that the failure to understand
> R certain, that

In the following a comma should replace the first *and* since there is no rhyme or reason for the pairing of the names. A comma is advisable after *Syme* (p. 164)

> His contemporaries were such men as Abernethy and Astley Cooper Syme and Dupuytren.
> R Abernethy Astley Cooper Syme, and Dupuytren.

COMMAS WHEN HEAVIER STOPS ARE NEEDED

Clauses separated by a comma must be closely associated in meaning

> The man is still living and co-operative, the hemiplegia remains the same.

The first clause refers to a general condition, the second to a disability A semi-colon is needed.

> The lungs were largely destroyed and showed signs of pneumonic consolidation, in some cases abscesses had formed.
> R: consolidation; in

Constipation may exist between such attacks, intermittent nausea and vomiting may be a main feature.
R such attacks Intermittent (or) such attacks. Intermittent

M. has a place in the treatment of depression but none in the treatment of hysterical or obsessional symptoms, and is contra-indicated in the presence of anxiety symptoms.
R *symptoms It is* (A comma should have been inserted between *depression* and *but*)

The Effect of Commas on Meaning

There is an obvious difference between "The day after, the house surgeon removed the stitches and 'The day after the house surgeon removed the stitches. But the best examples occur in defining and non-defining clauses. Although the distinction between these has already been explained (p 66) its importance warrants repetition. Consider the following

(*a*) The patient who takes a cheerful view of his condition has a good chance of recovery
(*b*) The patient, who takes a cheerful view of his condition, has a good chance of recovery

In (*a*) the subordinate clause describes the kind of patient who has a good chance of recovery. It is essential to the sentence and is called a defining clause. In (*b*) the clause refers to a particular patient. It is parenthetic and could be omitted without loss to the meaning of the main clause. It is called non-defining

"Nurses who are careless forget to sterilise needles is a statement of fact that can cause no offence. Nurses who are careless forget to sterilise needles is an insult to a great profession, it implies that all nurses are careless

Several of these patients had transient hemiparesis. In one of these who died of heart failure two years later a small cyst of the putamen was the sole anatomical remnant.

This suggests that many patients died of heart failure two years later. In fact, it happened to only one of them. The relative clause is parenthetic and non-defining and therefore should be separated from the rest of the sentence

R In one of these, who died of heart failure two years later a small

Optional Use of Commas

In some contexts the insertion or omission of a comma is a matter of taste, emphasis or syntax.

1 WITH CONJUNCTIONS

However must always be separated by commas. With *therefore* it is a matter of syntax. "We therefore believe that " "We believe therefore, that " After *and* and *or* when these separate long sentences, a comma is desirable. "If he has recovered from the severe attack of vomiting which he had when last I saw him, and if he is thought fit to stand the long journey he may go home." Many people, in speaking this sentence, would need to pause for breath after "saw him." The comma corresponds to the pause.

2. AFTER ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

After short initial adverbial clauses a comma may be inserted or omitted according to the emphasis required. "Formerly it was the practice " or "Formerly it was the practice " When a long adverbial clause precedes the main clause a comma is unnecessary but not wrong "When the patient has recovered from the operation he may go home" or " operation, he " But when it follows the main clause there should be no comma. "The patient may go home when he has recovered from the operation."

3. WITH A SERIES OF ADJECTIVES

If the adjectives precede the noun a comma should not be inserted after the last. "A pale, thin man." If they form a predicate a comma should not be inserted between the last two unless there is a change of thought. "He was truculent, insolent and blasphemous." "He was truculent, insolent, and unable to toe the line."

4. WITH A SERIES OF NOUNS

Opinions differ on two points (*a*) Should a comma be placed after the last noun? Fowler says "yes," giving as an example "Every man, woman, and child, was killed." This breaks the rule that a comma should not come between the subject and the predicate. Carey holds that the comma should

Constipation may exist between such attacks, intermittent nausea and vomiting may be a main feature.
R such attacks intermittent (or) such attacks. Intermittent

M has a place in the treatment of depression but none in the treatment of hysterical or obsessional symptoms, and is contraindicated in the presence of anxiety symptoms.
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Nurses who are careless forget to sterilise needles' is a statement of fact that can cause no offence. Nurses who are careless, forget to sterilise needles is an insult to a great profession it implies that all nurses are careless

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This suggests that many patients died of heart failure two years later In fact, it happened to only one of them The relative clause is parenthetic and non-defining and therefore should be separated from the rest of the sentence.

R In one of these, who died of heart failure two years later a small

> Under the torment of that new infliction a pair of shoulders would writhe a little. Teeth chattered. The sky was clearing, and bright sunshine gleamed over the ship. After every burst of battering seas, vivid and fleeting rainbows arched over the drifting hull in the flick of sprays. The gale was ending in a clear blow which gleamed and cut like a knife.
>
> (*The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*)

I prefer Stevenson's style because the semi-colon brings out the connection between the phrases. Conrad's style is too jerky. To the scientific writer the semi-colon is essential. It preserves the continuity of the subject and it helps the reader to grasp the relationship between one sentence and the next. It indicates a relationship that is too close for the full-stop and too remote for the comma. It also serves to separate sentences that describe different aspects of the same subject. A sentence that follows a semi-colon need not contain a finite verb. It may be a pithy comment on what has gone before, perhaps a sting in the tail.

I have already given examples of sentences in which a semi-colon should have been used instead of the comma. Here is an example of the reverse — the semi-colon is too heavy. (Observe my use of the semi-colon in the above sentence.)

> It was situated in the hypochondrium — and it was not relieved by food or alkalies.

Since both phrases refer to the pain they should have been more closely linked. A comma would have been sufficient or more than sufficient. The second *it* should have been omitted.

In the following on the other hand, the semi-colon is insufficient, because the sentences it separates are too long and because *postulated* introduces an idea too remote from the finding that has gone before

> R. *et al.* found that the serum of patients with lymphadenoid goitre contained an antibody to the patient's own thyroglobulin; and postulated that the destruction of the thyroid results from the progressive interaction of thyroglobulin in the gland with the auto-antibody present in the patient's circulation.
>
> R.   patient's own thyroglobulin. They postulated

Note my omission of *and*.

An example of correct use is

> Too often the tablets are allowed to become stale and inert from storage — they should be fresh.

be omitted when the last noun is preceded by *and*, but inserted when the *and* is omitted He would thus have us write

"The fever, malaise, and headache are characteristic." "Exophthalmos, tachycardia, tremors, enlargement of the thyroid, were all present." My view is that the comma should always be omitted after the last noun.

(*b*) Should a comma be placed, with *and* between the last two nouns?

In some circumstances omission causes ambiguity Omitting the titular adjuncts "Ltd" and "& Co" we might write "Among the exhibitors were Evans Medical, May and Baker and Glaxo" This would not indicate to the uninitiated that May and Baker are the same firm. Or again "We visited Caithness Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland" would fail to indicate that Ross and Cromarty are one shire.

> Epileptic states, the psychoses, the neuroses and their treatment are fully discussed.

This reads as though *treatment* refers only to *neuroses* A comma after *neuroses* would make *treatment* refer to all the conditions, as is evidently intended. To avoid ambiguity it is therefore advisable always to insert a comma between the last two nouns.

Commas with numbers

Ordinarily commas are placed between every three digits—35,617,500, but they are omitted in years—1066 and in documents—H M S O (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) Cmd. (Command) 29756

THE SEMI-COLON

Is the semi-colon necessary? In their use of it writers vary greatly Here are two sea pictures, the first by R. L. Stevenson, the second by Joseph Conrad

> From the mind of Herrick reason fled, he clung to the weather rigging, exulting he was done with life, and he gloried in the release be gloried in the wild noises of the wind and the choking onslaught of the rain he gloried to die so, and now amid this coil of the elements.
>
> (*The Ebb Tide*)

when the Bible was printed. Although great care was taken in its production I often wonder whether what seem to be faults to us were made because the compositors did not enjoy the benefits of efficient lighting and spectacles. In small print elderly people find these stops difficult to distinguish.

The uses of the colon are

1 To introduce lists, as in the line above, and in the following

> We used the criteria for electro-cardiographic evidence of myocardial ischaemia: large Q waves, flattening or inversion of T waves, and depression of the ST segment at rest or after exercise.

The writers might have used *viz.* or *namely* but the colon is more crisp. The colon must not be used in addition to *viz.* and *namely* but it must be used after *the following* and *as follows*. A dash after the colon (:—) though not wrong, is unnecessary

2 To introduce a quotation. Of this use there are innumerable examples in this book.

3. To introduce particulars after a general statement

> Patients with manic-depressive reaction showed relatively rapid rates of departure and discharge: more than 60% of single and over 75% of the ever-married [*sic*] left during the first three months.

(For *sic* see p. 170)

BRACKETS

Common brackets are used

1 In references. "Jones and Smith (1957) found that optic neuritis was always present." "Optic neuritis was invariably present (Jones and Smith, 1957)." "In this week's *Journal* (page 214) ..."

2 In alternative nomenclature

> His temperature was 100° F (37·8° C.)
>
> Each of our patients is provided with phytomenadione (vitamin K) to be taken by mouth.
>
> Hyperinfestation with round worms (*Ascaris lumbricoides*) is

3. In particularizing

> The mesenteric glands of all three groups (juxta-intestinal, intermediate, and terminal) were enlarged.

The semi-colon is also used to mark the main divisions of a long sentence in which minor clauses are separated by commas

> Sudden and protracted loss of consciousness is more likely to occur as an explosive effect of intracerebral haemorrhage, and so incidentally is vomiting and the hemiplegia, if due to pressure, may improve rapidly if haemorrhage ceases.
> R vomiting the hemiplegia

Again note my omission of *and* This, however, leaves *uncorrected another fault, namely the separation of sudden consciousness* from *vomiting*

> R Sudden and protracted loss of consciousness, and vomiting are more likely to occur as an explosive effect of intracerebral haemorrhage, the hemiplegia

THE COLON

The word colon" implies that this stop comes between the full-stop and the semi-colon This is *not so,* it is not in the hierarchy of stops, but has special functions. Many writers use the colon as an alternative to the semi-colon and give the impression that they use the one when they are tired of the other Because these stops look so much alike the careless writer ignores the difference between them Here are two examples of misuse chosen out of a very large number that could be cited

> Learning does not deal with external knowledge alone we have to revalue our own capacity for handling experience.
> R alone we

> The question which system is best, Dr E. thinks, is academic it depends on what one wants.
> R academic it

> There can be no denying the misery of a man with cancer of the gullet nor our inability to cure him.

The last example suggests the Psalms The style is not *suitable for a medical journal* No stop is needed *Nor* should be *or* (p 77)

In using colons and semi-colons writers should not follow the example of the *Authorised Version of the Bible* for here these stops are used indiscriminately

> Some therefore cried one thing and some another for the assembly was confused and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together

We do not know the rules of punctuation that were followed

In the above, dashes and brackets might have been interchanged. In point of fact commas would have been preferable to both.

> The real need—for permanently improved medical services—must await a permanently improved economy; and in many places this means vastly greater aid from the richer countries (including our own) than has yet been contemplated.

Here, both the dashes and the brackets break the sentence up unnecessarily

> R: The real need for permanently improved medical services must await the richer countries, including our own, than

Dashes emphasize parentheses more effectively than brackets Consider the following

(i) "The risks of operation—and they are serious—must be taken."

(ii) "The risks of operation (and they are serious) must be taken."

The seriousness of the operation is brought out more effectively in (i) than in (ii)

> Panhysterectomy—for nothing less is of any avail—must be performed immediately

The dash has two further uses (1) For particularizing·

> H. concluded that there was a very heavy excess of deaths from cancer—almost entirely among process workers—at two main anatomical sites, the lungs and the nose.

> The increase—£41 m.—was foreshadowed in the estimates.

(2) As a kind of afterthought

> There have been many remarkable developments in some of the old problems—intermediary metabolism, for example.

Like the colon, the dash does not need to be followed by *viz.* or *namely* and a sentence within dashes does not need to be enclosed by commas in addition.

INVERTED COMMAS

The chief use of inverted commas is to enclose quotations, or "quotes" as they are technically called. (Note the inverted commas in the last sentence.)

4. In clauses too remote from the main stream of thought to be inserted within commas

> Only recognized changes of acute myocardial infarction (fully defined and classified in the report) should be accepted as evidence of coronary artery disease.

5. Within lists the members of which are separated by commas

> It consists of amino-acids (the importance of which was first stressed by F.) salts, glucose, vitamins, and hypoxanthine.

Brackets are often used unnecessarily

> The white-cell count (on the morning after the operation) was 12 500
>
> There was slight distension of the abdomen, with marked guarding and tenderness to the right of the umbilicus. (Within this area the point of maximal tenderness varied from time to time.) Vigorous bowel sounds were heard

Stops with Brackets

When a bracketed sentence comes within a main sentence it must not be separated by commas otherwise the flow of the main sentence is disturbed. When the bracketed sentence comes at the end the full-stop normally follows the closing bracket but when the bracketed sentence needs a full-stop in its own right the full-stop comes before the bracket. An example is seen in the last quotation above.

Square Brackets

Words within square brackets indicate that they are inserted by the quoter for the purpose of explanation and are not part of the quotation There are several examples in this book. Here is another

> A decline in the plasma levels of individual protein fractions [in the nephrotic syndrome] almost always bears a relationship to their urinary clearances.

DASHES

Dashes serve virtually the same purpose as brackets

> Most of the local-authority hospitals—which between them held more than half the beds in this country—were directly administered by a medical superintendent (and less directly by the medical officer of health)

Inverted commas should not be used for very ordinary words

> The flexing force increases from the upright to the "prone" position.
>
> "Deflation" by needle and suction is a useful prelude to operation.
>
> This could be prevented by gradually "tailing off" the dosage.

EXCLAMATION MARKS

The common use of exclamation marks—"Oh!" "Order!" "Withdraw!"—has of course no place in scientific writing. They should not be used to express astonishment as in "The cyst was as large as an orange!" If any of his readers have seen one larger than an orange the writer merely displays his inexperience. He should be content with the bare fact. Nor should exclamation marks be used to express facetiousness

> I have an idea that our registrars are confused and clinically unhappy. A more suggestive approach would both reduce the death-rate, and restore some measure of junior surgical equanimity

QUESTION MARKS

Care must be taken not to use these with indirect questions.

Correct I said, "Why didn't you go to your doctor sooner?"

Incorrect I asked her why she hadn't gone to her doctor sooner?

The use of the question mark to express doubt is legitimate "The diagnosis was ? bronchial carcinoma ? sarcoidosis.

HYPHENS

The use of hyphens in technical terms is discussed on p. 155. Here I need only add a few remarks on their use in plain English. The common use of hyphens, as in sugar-free diet, three-year-old girl needs no comment. Here are a few special points. Hyphens are used

1 In an adjective formed of an adverb and participle. "A little-used instrument." This is obviously different from "a little used instrument." Note, however that the hyphen is

A quotation must be an exact copy of the original

Correct He said, "I am fed up with lying in bed"
He said he was 'fed up' with lying in bed.
Incorrect He said 'he was fed up with lying in bed'

If a quotation contains a mis-spelling or a word that the quoter thinks inappropriate the faulty word should be followed by [*sic*] E g 'In his letter he said, I didn't like the convalessant [*sic*] home. This shows that the mis-spelling is not the fault of the quoter For another example see 'ever-married,' p 167

Either double or single commas " " or ' ', may be used The former are more usual single commas being reserved for inner quotations 'Lloyd George,' he said, 'promised patients rare and refreshing fruit' "Rare and refreshing fruit" were Lloyd George's words A quotation can be preceded either by a comma or by a colon a comma is preferable for a short, a colon for a long quotation When a quotation is interrupted as in the last example above, the interrupting words are preceded and followed by commas. A stop precedes the closing inverted commas as shown in all the examples given here

Inverted commas are also used

1 For colloquialisms that have not been admitted to the literary canon

> Preludin was taken by the patients to "pep" them up.

2 For ordinary words when these have a special technical meaning

> The doctrine of "diminished responsibility" in the criminal law

3 For new terms that are introduced tentatively and have not gained general acceptance

> The Report of the W H.O committee advocates "geriatric guidance centre.

4. For terms to which the writer objects

> I and F disagree with the term "dependence" as an essential part of addiction.

5 To express sarcasm

> The modern so-called "advances" in the treatment of intestinal obstruction.

4. For pronouncements by such authorities "The Report (of the Royal Commission) says " but, "the bacteriologist's report says "

5. For some special words, e.g. Press and University "The University of Cambridge (but the city of Cambridge)

6. For adjectives denoting countries "The Japanese method "

Capitals must be used for all the words of a title except small words such as *and*, *of*, *for*. He wrote "A Text-book of Anatomy."

ITALICS

Italics are used

1 To convey emphasis that cannot be conveyed in any other way and that in speech would be brought out by a change in tone "I don't care what any one says it is a sarcoma." This device must be used very sparingly (I may perhaps be allowed to say *very* sparingly)

2 In foreign words that have not been naturalized *cause célèbre* but camouflage.

3. In titles of books and journals. In books the whole title must be in italics. "*The Origin of Species*" not "The *Origin of Species*."

omitted when the adverb and participle do not form an adjective 'This instrument is little used.'

2 Between a noun and a gerund

In addition to history taking
R history-taking

THE APOSTROPHE

It should be unnecessary to point out that possessive pronouns take no apostrophe This book is hers, not "her's," and that the possessive of it' is its (not 'it's" which means it is) Plurals ending in s' take the apostrophe without an additional s — mothers' helps, patients' breakfasts. Plurals not ending in s take the apostrophe before the s — children s wards, "men s wards,' women s wards Nearly all single words ending in s' take the apostrophe followed by s", e.g St. Thomas s," even though the word when spoken lacks euphony, e.g ' Malthus s Among the few exceptions are "Socrates'" and Graves' (disease)

In plural nouns used as adjectives the apostrophe is optional. ' A three days history or 'A three days' history

When there are two or more possessors or collaborators an apostrophe after the last named should not be used to cover all of them "Jones and Smith s findings show ' R ' The findings of Jones and Smith show

CAPITALS

The rules are to use capitals

1 For titles or ranks when followed by the name of the holder He was the son of Lord X he was as drunk as a lord."

2 For unique positions The President of the Royal College of Surgeons" but The medical superintendent."

3 For appointed authorities The Royal Commission on " The General Purposes Committee (but "they formed a committee) ' The Body which decides such questions

4. For pronouncements by such authorities "The Report (of the Royal Commission) says " but, "the bacteriologist's report says "

5. For some special words e.g. Press and University "The University of Cambridge (but the city of Cambridge)

6. For adjectives denoting countries "The Japanese method "

Capitals must be used for all the words of a title except small words such as *and, of, for* He wrote "A Text-book of Anatomy"

ITALICS

Italics are used

1 To convey emphasis that cannot be conveyed in any other way and that in speech would be brought out by a change in tone "I don't care what any one says it *is* a sarcoma." This device must be used very sparingly (I may perhaps be allowed to say *very* sparingly)

2 In foreign words that have not been naturalized

crane d'lu're but camouflage.

3. In titles of books and journals. In books the whole title must be in italics. "*The Origin of Species*" not "The *Origin of Species*."

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